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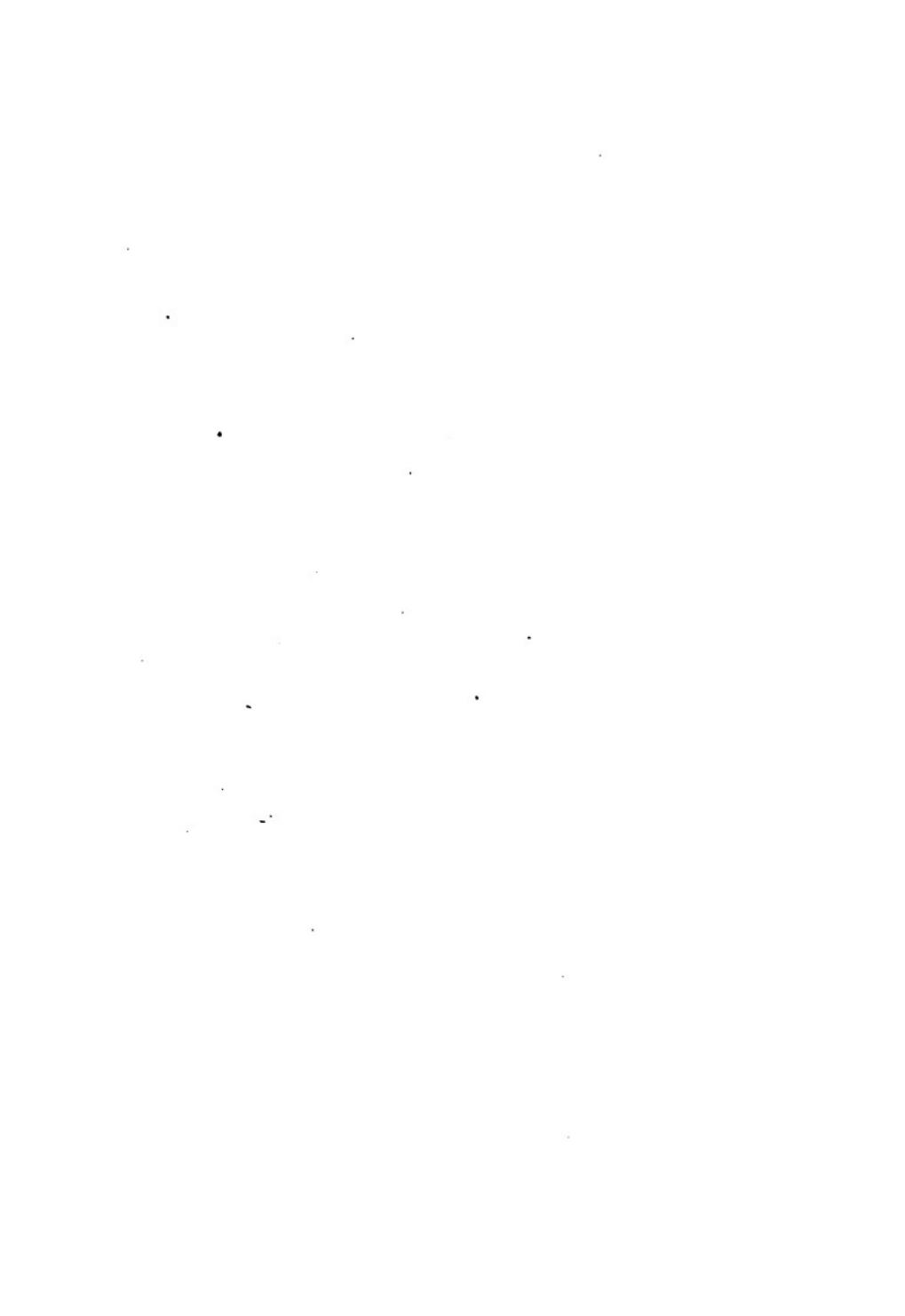


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THE

HAPPY CHURCH:

BY THE

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Author of "Sketches of a Missionary's Travels," "Goodness of Divine Providence," "Geology and Geologists," "Chapters on National Education," Familiar Lectures to Children," &c.



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INTRODUCTION.

A FREQUENT reply to any question respecting your neighbour's religious views or experience is, "Oh, I belong to the Church," or, "I belong to the Church of England." Doubtless, the man speaks English, not French, nor Italian. But does he suppose that piety is national or hereditary, like his mother-tongue? An answer like the above, makes us sometimes suspect that he wishes to blink the question.

A spiritual Christian would probably have couched his reply in more precise words; so as to make us understand that he was *a Member* of the Episcopal Church in a particular town or district, or under the pastoral care of a certain Minister. True, many unholy persons profess to worship in the same house of prayer; but *they* are properly called "members of the Congregation."

In Scripture, we find the "Church of Christ" used in a general sense to include all the little

churches scattered throughout the world. Thus we speak of the British army or fleet as one ; though we may have many small armies and fleets serving in different parts of the world, and composed of men of different colours and languages. But they are all under one supreme government, by which they are supported and directed : so they are called the British army and navy. None *belong* to them except those who have been regularly enlisted. In the same way, we use the terms “medical and legal professions,” and other words of general import. Nobody says he “belongs to them,” simply because he has heard about them, and has been in company with some of their members. Even the clerks and reporters in the courts of law, and the nurses and dressers in hospitals do not claim membership with these “professions.”

St. Paul thought that the people, not the walls of a building, composed the Church.* According to scripture, *you form part* of the Church, if you are a believer in Christ, and make an open profession of that belief. Suppose you go to a place called, for confusion’s sake, a Church ;—what good have you received

* Rom. xvi. 5 : 1 Cor. xvi. 19 : Philem. 2.

by your attendance there? Are you converted? Have you renounced sin, and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ unto "justification of life?" Then, you really belong to the church.

But we can imagine a different state of the case. You felt rather indisposed; or feared you were unwell; and a friend advised you to go to the Hospital, where a certain physician would be in attendance. Instead, however, of seeking a private interview, and asking him to examine the state of your health, you repaired to the Lecture-room, where you heard him discourse upon a certain malady, its symptoms, and mode of cure. You were pleased, and went again and again. In the course of his lectures, he touched upon a disease resembling your own; but spoke of it so slightly, and prescribed such simple remedies—regular exercise and diet, and a little sugar-water, that you thought there could not be much the matter with you, and concluded that your former apprehensions arose from mere "lowness of spirits."

You heard another Lecturer. He described your symptoms so exactly, that you felt assured he understood your complaint. He pointed out the usual course of the disease: it was an

internal disorder, little understood and less attended to; but which usually terminates fatally. You were alarmed; yet, since you did not feel very sick, you thought that he might be mistaken in his prognostications, or that yours was an exempt case. Since, also the remedies prescribed were rather self-denying, you would not yet have recourse to so painful an expedient. Indeed, you hoped by a little care, to get well in an easier way. Still, it would be prudent to continue listening to the physician, lest matters should turn out worse than you expected, and you could follow his advice when the emergency became more apparent. Would you, under such circumstances, tell your friend, that you had put yourself under the care of Dr.—, and were now one of his patients?" Have you any better reason for saying that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, and a member of his Church?

These observations are made with the simple view of pointing out the meaning that we shall give to the word "Church" in the following pages. It is a company of believers, separate from the world, and witnessing for Christ. Other people may join in their acts of devotion; *but they are not of Christ's Church.*

The Church is “the body of Christ.* It is therefore, visible to the world, seen of men, confessing the Saviour. There is no merely “spiritual Church” (about which some speak, so mystically,) except indeed a congregation of Spiritual Beings, unclothed with flesh, like “the Church of the first-born” assembled in heaven.† If we belong to the Church *on earth*, we are genuine members of a body of professing Christians, “shewing forth the praises (or virtues) of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.”‡ “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”§

It is this reception into the *family* of God, which forms the basis of the Christian Church. For, when the returning prodigal has been graciously pardoned, and his heart renewed by the gift of the Holy Ghost;|| he is not turned adrift, nor made a mere servant of the household; but becomes by *adoption*, a member of that spiritual family of which Christ is Chief;¶

*Ephes. i. 23. †Heb. xii. 23. ¶1 Pet. ii. 9. ¶2 Cor. vi. 17, 18

||Acts ii. 38. ¶Luke xv. 22—24.

and as he thus commences a new relationship with Heaven, so he enters into a *brotherly* connection with all the children of God upon earth.

Or, to employ another Scriptural figure, when we individually become united to Christ by living faith, we become parts of *his body* ;* because we receive those blessings for which he “became flesh” and died, and which are communicated to us through his atonement and intercession. Christ is the Head, and his people are the living members.† Each believer has thus an important connection with the Saviour, and also unites in sympathy with his faithful followers. They all drink of one Spirit, are guided by one Wisdom, have similar hopes and joys, and are dependent for a part of their blessedness on the prosperity of the whole body. This is largely unfolded by St. Paul in the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians.

When a Church contains many believers, it will have numerous springs of happiness and vigour. Whether they be babes in Christ, or young men, or fathers,‡ they are all members of the household of faith. Every sincere convert forms another link of connection between

*Ephes. v. 30. †Ephes. iv. 15, 16. ‡1 John ii. 13.

heaven and earth. A new channel of communication is opened between the reservoir above and the church beneath. Instead of a cold hearer of the word, whose unconcern about spiritual things caused pain and anxiety to the faithful worshippers; another heart is kindled with the fire of divine love, to shed its warm and cheering influences upon the circle around. A little more leaven has been put into the lump. Christ has found another lodging-place in his Church. A chamber in the house of God, which was furnished with worldliness, darkened by sin, and haunted by evil spirits, is now illumined with heaven's sun-shine, adorned with the graces of salvation, and filled with an atmosphere of praise and devotion. Ministering angels, bringing messages of love to the new heir of glory,* scatter a fragrant odour upon the family around. Who, that has been present at the conversion of a sinner, and heard his first triumphant song, "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me,"† but has felt a heavenly influence pervading the place, as if angels shared in the common joy;‡ and has been ready to exclaim,

*Heb. i. 14. †Isa. xiii. 1. ‡Luke xv. 10.

"this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;";* and *it was* the gate of heaven; the place where God came forth from his sanctuary, to receive and bless a returning prodigal.

These visits of mercy, when known to a Church, greatly revive and strengthen her energies. She has many difficulties to contend with, many sore conflicts with the powers of hell, and with the "Rulers of the darkness of this world;" and she has to mourn over some who decline from the ways of righteousness, or to sigh for the loss of her useful children, when taken away to join the Church above. Repeated manifestations of Christ's saving power, are constant proofs that the great Head is still present, walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks.† But we do not wonder that a Church should be cold and cheerless, when they never *know* that their Lord pays them a solitary visit of saving mercy; or that there should be little brotherly love, when the presence of Christ is limited to the idea of religious forms and services, in which his name is employed.

*Gen. xxviii. 17. †Rev. ii. 1.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE IN THE CHURCH.

A CHURCH should resemble a domestic circle, in which each seeks to promote the good and comfort of the rest, and in so doing finds his own. The gospel always likens the company of believers to a family, of which God is the Father, and Christ is the elder Brother. It has, therefore, rights and privileges of its own: it has family claims and duties. Our love to the brethren should resemble that of Christ's; "a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* This is the rule and measure of brotherly love. Let us look at some of its principles and effects.

Love is operative.—It delights in doing good. It does so at a personal sacrifice. If we only

*John xiii. 34, 35.

perform acts of kindness and sympathy, when we can *spare* the time, means, or opportunity,—that is, when it will cost no self-denial, our love is not of the right stamp. “ Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.* If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye ought also to wash one another’s feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.”† “ He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”‡ These greater acts of love, to be performed in times of extremity, of course imply that smaller ones are to be attended to, whenever opportunity serves. We are to be active in all works of charity and kindness.§ Courtesy,|| gentleness,¶ and long-suffering| should be always exercised. This love must be *mutual*. It cannot be expected to be long kept up on one side, if it be not reciprocated on the other. Whilst love gives tokens of its regard, it looks for them in return. We must be as careful to pay as to receive them. The

*Matt. xx. 27, 28. †John xiii. 4. ‡1 John iii. 16. §Acts x. 38

||1 Pet. iii. 8. ¶1 Thess. ii. 7. |Ephes. iv. 22.

manifestations of brotherly affection are to be made by all the family. St. Paul was gentle amongst his converts, as a nurse who cheriseth her children; and would if possible, have imparted his very soul, because they were dear to him.* On the other hand, he bears witness that some of them would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him :† for they bore with his infirmities and received him as an angel of God.‡

Love is disinterested.—It seeketh not its own.§ In conjunction with its own welfare, it considers the interest and feelings of another.|| When both cannot be secured at the same time, it yields its own superior claims. Who has not admired the conduct of Abraham towards Lot? Though his nephew was much his inferior in every respect, and had been protected and treated by him as a son; yet he voluntarily relinquishes his rights [as] father and chief, and directs the young man to make his choice of the land. “Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? If thou wilt take the left hand, then I

**Ephes. ii. 7, 8.* †*Gal. iv. 15. ¶ 13, 14.* ||*Cor. xiii. 5. ¶¶ Cor. xii. 24.*

will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."* If such a spirit pervaded the Church, it would soon exhibit the beauties of holiness.†

Love is sympathetic.—It shows a fellow feeling for a friend. It tries to comfort his distress, to lighten his cares, to mingle with his sorrows, and to participate in his joys. St. Paul says, "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it."‡ Is it so? If a christian sustain spiritual loss, by becoming careless or worldly, is his case mourned over, like that of a sick member of your family? Do you all visit him, and endeavour to restore his spiritual health? If he backslide, do you weep over him as over a loved one that is dead?§

Love has a cementing quality.—It binds hearts together. It knit the soul of Jonathan to David, so that he loved him as his own soul.|| St. Paul strove to effect this knitting of hearts in the Church.¶ It is this love that joins the stones of the living temple, and makes it strong and comely.

I used frequently to pass along a road bounded by a wall, the stones of which were not

*Gen. xiii. 8, 9. †Psa. cx. 8. ‡1 Cor. xii. 26. ¶Phil. iii. 18.

|| Sam. xviii. 1. ¶Col. ii. 2.

united by any kind of cement. They were piled upon each other with some regularity, and a respect to their shape and size ; but they had no general bond of union. Consequently, after a heavy storm, some of the stones were sure to be dislodged, and strewed on the pathway, to the great peril and annoyance of passengers, especially in the dark. Most of these were satisfied with threading their own way, leaving others to take care of themselves. But it often caused *me* much trouble, as I could not with a very easy conscience, permit so many stumbling-stones to remain, when it was in my power to remove them. I could pick up the smaller ones, and roll the larger to one side of the footpath. It was, therefore, with no little satisfaction that I one day found nearly the whole wall levelled with the ground, and men employed in putting it up again, in a better style.

This crazy wall was a mournful emblem of a little Church in the adjoining village. The cement of love had become decomposed, and lost all its adhesive qualities. Members were falling off after every little breeze, which Satan took care to send pretty frequently. At last a storm arose, by which the whole was prostrated.

Some never joined again ; others were put aside because they were unruly;* and with much trouble, a small Church was collected out of the ruins of the old one. The foundation was good ; it was that of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.† Since that time, it has greatly prospered.

Love never lays down a stumbling block.‡ On the contrary, it tries to remove every cause of offence. The true Christian is a member of the Grand Peace Society. This Society was organized in heaven. Its formation was announced to earth by angels.§ Its capital was all paid up by Immanuel.|| Shares are freely offered to any applicant.¶ The rules of the Society are, that each member be peaceable and a peacemaker. 1

The town of _____ is built upon hills, and its neighbourhood is very elevated. You cannot go out of the town without requiring to ascend or descend some great declivity. On account of the manufactures in that district, much carting is necessary ; and the carters of that district are a rough, ungentle class of men.

*Titus i. 10. †Ephes. ii. 20. ‡Matt. xviii. 7. § Luke ii. 14.

, ||Col. 20. ¶Ephes. ii. 17. 1James iii. 17, 18.

To ease their own horses in ascending the steeps they take large stones from the road-side, and put them behind the wheels, so as to stop their carts till the animals have breathed a little. This is so far right, in mercy to the poor beasts. But they constantly leave the stones in the middle of the road, to the great peril of others who may travel that way. Being obliged frequently to journey in those parts by night, our slight carriage was in much danger of being upset or broken by these stumbling-blocks. In fogs or storms, it required great caution, with strong lights, to thread our way down some of the hills. When we passed along by day-light, we used to note in our memory the principal spots where such stumbling-stones lay, that we might avoid them on our return in the dark. We did not accuse the carters of wilful cruelty, but of thoughtless selfishness. In executing their own purposes, they were heedless of another's welfare. In gaining their own end, they cared not what mischief might happen to their neighbour.

Many people act in a similar way. To gratify their own tongues, or accomplish their own wishes, they are heedless of throwing stumbling-blocks in the way of others. To

please themselves, they care not if their neighbour suffer in reputation, or be wounded in his most tender feelings. Perhaps, from some loose expression used about a Minister, a prejudice is excited against him, which will make his ministrations useless to some of his hearers. We have known instances in which, from a similar reason, persons have refused going to hear a true “man of God.”

The like mischief may accrue to private members of a Church, if they put stumbling-blocks in each other’s way. A religious cause may greatly suffer, because one of its adherents has left a tripping-stone, which others have not been careful to avoid. The press of the present day teems with stones of offence. Many periodicals have this for their avowed object—to upset their neighbours. Others, in advocating a real or fancied reform, forget what causes of mischief they may leave behind; how much discontent, jealousy, bitterness, angry feeling, may arise from their uncharitable reflections. In this way, the best cause may be productive of much sin and misery, if it be advocated in a reckless spirit: if, in endeavouring to help itself up the hill, it leave stumbling-blocks in the public road.

Very different from the conduct of the carters above mentioned, was the temper exhibited by an uncle in the days of my boyhood. I used to walk with him to church, more than a mile through the streets of Glasgow. We two generally went together: the rest of the family kept in the rear. The good man seemed to have his eyes ever roving about the pathway, especially in the season of orange-peel. He knew of some persons who had slipped down and been seriously injured by these little nuisances. So he would allow none to remain—he carefully removed every article by which a passenger might sustain a fall. Nothing of the kind eluded his observant eye. It often made our walk tedious, and took away its pleasure: but for this he cared not. Good man! he thought of everybody before himself. I have known him lend not only his own umbrella, but also mine to a stranger; because he feared that her handsome dress would suffer more from the rain, than our woollen clothes were likely to do. I dwell with pleasure upon his memory. It often suggests this thought, “Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.”*

*Matt. v. 9.

May all hate stumbling-blocks and slipping-stones ; and rather learn to be silent,* than be the means of leaving a tripping *word* behind.

The Psalmist described Jerusalem as a city that is compact together.† Whilst peace was within her walls, prosperity was within her palaces, and all her lovers prospered.‡ We are told that when Titus saw the strength of her fortifications, he was surprised that such a city could ever have been taken. She was invincible till she lost the last blessing of the God of Peace. When He finally left the city, discord entered with unbridled fury ; and their own internal strifes did more to hasten their ruin, than all the resources of hostile Rome, or the prowess of conquering Titus. So when the Prince of Peace deserts a Church, her downfall is at hand. Her own members pull her to pieces.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God ; and every one that loveth, is born of God and knoweth God. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also ;§ not only in word, but in deed and in truth.||

*James i. 19. †Ps. cxxii. 3. ‡6,7. §1 Jo. 4. 11, 21. ||1 Jo. iii. 18.

CHAPTER II.

UNANIMITY IN THE CHURCH.

The great design of Christ in having a Church or Churches on earth, is the promotion of his kingdom in the hearts of his own people, and the spread of it through the world by their instrumentality. Believers are enjoined to abound in love,* so as to have fervent charity amongst themselves ;† and to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord.‡ With these acquirements, they must be the light of the world by a good example ;§ the salt of the earth by their holy doctrine and purity of morals ;|| the ameliorating leaven of the human race,¶ by their zealous and active endeavours to diffuse the blessings of salvation.

Christ's kingdom is a reign of grace. The hearts of the Church are its seat of power. According to the amount and increase of grace

*Phil. i. 9. †1 Pet. iv. 8. ‡2 Pet. iii. 13. §Matt. v. 14, 16. ¶Matt. xiii. 33.

in believers, will be the prosperity and extension of the empire. If there be discord and poverty in the capital, no foreign war can be waged with success. But if the internal resources of the kingdom be abundant, and all the subjects be loyal to their king, they will co-operate in his wars of righteousness and peace,* and carry his arms far abroad. The spread of Christ's cause in the world will, therefore, depend upon the prosperity of the Church.

You cannot force a revival of religion in a little moment. It must first deepen, and then spread. If the waters of the sanctuary be shallow, they will not overflow to fertilize the desert. If you force them over their banks as by *machinery*, you only scatter them, and render the whole liable to speedy evaporation. But if the waters deepen in their own channel, and rise by an influx of the limpid stream so high as to water their banks; then one plentiful shower may swell them to overflowing, and cover the wilderness with fructifying moisture.† When a Church is full of love, and *already revives* her immediate neighbourhood, *another baptism of the Holy Spirit* will make

*Rom. xiv. 17. †Ezek. xlviij. 1—5.

her a blessing to the desert world. When the Apostolic Churches were edified, and walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*

It was a constant effort of the Apostles to keep their followers in a state of unanimity, so as to preserve them from diversity of opinion and distraction of effort. Assured that their common peace and prosperity depended upon a union of mind, they ever inculcated it upon the rising Church; and when any element of discord seemed likely to arise, they met together, and conversed and prayed about the matter, till it was settled to general satisfaction.† It is recorded of St. John, that when he was too old and feeble to preach or even to walk into the Church, he was carried thither in a chair; and looking upon the assembled disciples with liveliest emotions of love and tenderness, he would utter these words, "little children, love one another." He was Christian and philosopher enough to know that unanimity was the secret of their prosperity, their happiness in peace, their strength in war.

It is unanimity that has made the Jesuits so formidable and successful a body. Who ever

**Acts ix. 31.* †*See Acts vi. 11, 15.*

hears of a Jesuit finding fault with the rules of his order, or complaining of his companions, or exposing their errors and weaknesses? Does he ever take *his own* way, or seem to pursue *his own* interests? Does he not smother every rising feeling of self-will? Are not devotion to his order and obedience to his superiors manifest in all his proceedings? If such a body of men had Christ for their real Head, and the Holy Ghost for their ruling spirit, and God's truth for their word of command, they would soon fill the world with the doctrines of salvation.

The disunion of the Church keeps it low. There are not only differences between Protestant Churches of different names: but a want of unanimity in members of the same congregation. We do not speak of outward conformity. This uniformity may exist where is no agreement of *active* mind, nor cordiality of thought and affection. There may be the uniformity of death or *inertia*. Indeed, the more an unsanctified Church is dead, the more it is likely to be uniform. Things divine do not occupy the thoughts of its members, so they never disagree about them. They have no war against the world, the flesh, and the

devil ; so they have no discord of effort. They aim not at the glory of God, by exhibiting the beauty of holiness ; so they have no quarrels about discipline. As they do not hear the truth to practice it, it is of little importance to them if the teaching be not quite correct.

It is an awakened, half-enlightened, stirring Church—but not pervaded with the leaven of divine love—that is most likely to be disunited. Each member begins to think “how he would have things done :” and without paying scrupulous regard to the will of God, or the claims of christian brotherhood, he strives to promote his own sentiments and bring about his own purposes. This may be done from a belief that his opinion is right and that his way is best : but he is apt to overlook the paramount claims of Christ, in a submission to His will and way. Love is to reign over zeal. Love should stimulate, pervade, and regulate all our exercises of thought and action. If any device, word, or deed would infringe upon the superior rights of love, it is a sign that the thoughts want regulating, or the tongue needs bridling.*

*“But in this way and with these restrictions,
how are we to reform the Church and the*

*James i. 26.

into his spirit, and accustom themselves to think as He does on various subjects, there would be unanimity of opinion on every matter of importance. It is not so. We are apt to come to the bible, with our previous views and predilections, to find scripture proof for them, not to have them tested and reprobated.* We come, not to learn that we have been wrong, but to convince ourselves that we are right.

Under these circumstances, it is perhaps a mercy that there are so many Protestant Churches, holding different views of religion : that there may be no excuse for any sincere man not joining himself to some denomination. He must have a perverse mind and crooked will, who cannot find one sect with which he mainly agrees in opinion. It would be unseemly to have a diversity of creeds in one Church. It would be very inconvenient ; because the members could never harmonize. Ministers and people could not speak or hear to profit. It is our duty earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.† We may not compromise the truth, or tamely agree with error. We are commanded not to hear wrong doctrine, as for instruction.‡

**1 Cor. iii. 18.* †*Jude iii.* ‡*Prov. xix. 27.*

It is becoming a sort of fashion of the day, for Christians of contending creeds to compliment each other by talking of their *minor differences*. This proceeds from a good motive, but if not rightly guarded, *may* lead to the error of indifference to truth. If our diversities be so small, why cannot they be amicably settled? If so unimportant, why do we appear in rival Churches?

It shall not be always so. These differences argue a low state of the Church. The watchmen shall see eye to eye, and together shall they sing, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.* There shall be one fold and one Shepherd.† When all shall be taught of the Lord,‡ we cannot well suppose that they will learn different lessons of divine truth. For, “if any be otherwise minded,” or differently-minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.§ He therefore promises to take away this discord of sentiment, when they shall apply to Him for that purpose.

For the present, till this happy time arrive, and the breaches of Zion be built up, let persons of different creeds band together in separate Churches. Let them form different regi-

**Isa. lvi. 8.* †*John x. 16.* ‡*Isa. liv. 13.* §*Phil. iii. 15.*

ments in the great army of Immanuel. Let each use their own form of sword and shield, so that these be taken from the armoury of faith :* let them try the comparative virtue of their weapons, not upon each other's ranks, but upon the common foe. In different columns and with various tactics, let them attack the world, the flesh, and the devil ; and adjust their own differences when the warfare has been concluded. Meanwhile, it would be both unseemly and dangerous for the same company to use weapons of various forms. They could not act in concert. They might wound one another. They certainly would interfere with each other's movements.

The case is not the same with respect to forms of Church government and discipline. These are mostly of *human* arrangement. A few general principles are laid down in the gospel respecting the character of the Ministry,† their legitimate authority,‡ and the necessity of keeping the Church pure from immoral persons, and the abettors of false doctrine.§ Such injunctions given by Christ involve a question of moral obligation: so that

**Ephes. vi. 16, 17.* †*Tit. i. 5—9:* *1 Tim. iii. 2—7.* ‡*Heb. xiii. 1.*
§*1 Cor. v. 13:* *Rev. ii. 14, 20:* *Tit. i. 10, 11.*

proper attention to them is necessary, in order to keep a clear conscience toward God. But *how* they are to be put in practice; what are the best *modes* of doing so; with whom the minor arrangements of Church affairs should rest; or what may be the best forms of public worship and sacrament—are subjects of human opinion, and may necessarily vary in different places and under different circumstances. They are points of *preference*, not of *conscience*.

It is essential to make this distinction between conscience and opinion, duty and choice. The one rests upon a plain and unmistakable announcement of scripture; the other may proceed from some inference which we draw from the truth, or from a mere bias of inclination. The first must be attended to at all hazards; the latter should often be given up for a general good. The two may sometimes come into collision; when our personal preferences must at once yield to the order of God. For instance, the pursuit of peace in a Church,* and obedience to the conscientious arrangements of the Ministry,† are distinct commands of scripture, and therefore plain *points of duty*: so that, where they do not

*Rom. xiv.19. †Heb. xiii.11.

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infringe upon purity and justice, they should be vigorously maintained at any sacrifice of choice or opinion. When our private views and preferences do not accord with public regulations, a case arises, in which our principles of humility and self-denial are put to the test. Do we love the Church or ourselves most? Shall we obey Christ's general laws, or our own particular wishes? Shall we follow a plain duty, or make this yield to our private predilections?

Christ, the Head of the Church, has provided for these emergencies, by furnishing the graces of humility and self-denial to those who apply for them. He set us an example; for He pleased not himself.* Neither did St. Paul. He became servant unto all, and was made all things to all men, that he might save some.† He knew that circumcision and temple-offerings and feasts were nothing;‡ yet he conformed to Jewish (innocent) prejudices, that he might gain the Jews.§ He himself evidently liked some of the Jewish customs and modes of worship,|| yet he abandoned *them* when ministering to the Gentiles.¶ He

*Rom. xv. 3. †1 Cor. ix. 19—22. ‡Gal. v. 6. §Acts. xvi. 3.
||See Acts xx. 16: xxiv. 17, 18. ¶1 Cor. ix. 21.

knew that meat and wine would not injure him, because they had been first presented in an idol's temple: but he declined to partake of them in presence of a prejudiced Jew.* He declared his *divine right* to be supported by the Church to whom he ministered;† but when he found it would be a stumbling block to the wealthy and covetous Corinthians, he refused to ask their money. When they afterwards complained of his independent spirit, he protested that he would keep it to the end—for *their own good.*‡

Happy Church! where the members agreeing upon essentials, have learned to submit and be subject one to another in minor arrangements!§ Where each endeavours to please his neighbour to edification !! Where all private wishes are sacrificed on the altar of unanimity! Where each tries how much of his own pleasure he can yield to the general good! Where all strive to lose little self in the will of God and the glory of Christ!

Suppose the builders of a house to disagree. Though all are satisfied as to the right kind of materials with which they must work; yet

**I Cor. vii, 19, 28, 29.* †*1 Cor. ix. 7—11.* ‡*Cor. viii. 10—12.*

‡*1 Pet. v. 5.* ¶*Rom. xv. 2.*

envy, and vanity out of the house, and all will be well.

Another finds fault, that Paul has given to Timothy and Titus a piece of preferment which he had hoped to enjoy. Then rejoice that there are at least *some* men more worthy than yourself, and esteem them highly.* We are to be *clothed with humility*,† not only to be humble, but to *shew* it to the world. Would it not be a most melancholy idea, to think that we, with all our failings (which an enlightened spirit well knows,) were the best or wisest in the Church? What a poor notion we must entertain of God's people, if we for a moment suspect that we could direct them *all*, and that their united understanding is inferior to ours!

When we can find a man who easily obtains pre-eminence by his superior wisdom and talents, let us rejoice to hold him forth to the world as a good specimen of the power of divine grace,‡ and a noble trophy of the Cross of Christ.§ Happy the Church, whose members have learned, in honour to prefer one another.|| Let all strive to learn of Christ, *who was meek and lowly in heart*; so shall

**Phil. ii. 3.* †*1 Pet. v. 5.* ‡*Gal. i. 24.* ||*Tim. i. 16.* ¶*Rom. 12. 10.*

they find rest to their own souls,* from passion and discontent; so shall the Church revive, and the world be blessed!

The stormy season of dispute, and the frosty days of disunion, are not favourable times for building the temple of God. The summer of the Church is the hope of the world. May the Lord cause his righteousness to shine, and by his radiant beams of love, disperse the clouds and thaw the ice of discord, that His people may be One, as He is One! Then shall the world believe in Christ the Universal Saviour.†

* Matt. xi. 29. † John xvii. 21.

CHAPTER III.

DILIGENCE IN THE CHURCH.

EVERYBODY knows what is meant by *diligence*. It is a word much employed in temporal matters. It is to use the time and means at our command with activity, care, and perseverance. This seems to take in the full compass of the term, "all diligence," found in the epistles of St. Paul,* Peter,† and Jude.‡ St. Peter tells the Church, that if they thus endeavour to profit in religion, they shall never fall, but have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of Christ's glory.§ A church which shall be so honoured in heaven, must be happy and useful on earth. Let us, therefore, look at some of the qualities of christian diligence.

I. It means *activity* as opposed to *listlessness*. Consider a vegetable how it grows! Fixed in *the soil* where it was sown or planted, it

**Cor. viii. 7.* †*2 Pet. i. 5.* ‡*Jude iii.* ¶*2 Pet. i. 11.*

receives any nourishment that may come to it. It makes no movement to procure a subsistence. It turns round to receive the light which shines upon it, or spreads its roots toward some moisture which happens to be near. But it remains fixed in its place. It vegetates without any exertion of its own. All its nourishment is brought to its side. If there be genial rain and sunshine, it grows with seeming ardour. If drought or cold supervene, it droops, withers, dies. If the ground be manured, it expands with luxuriance ; if the soil be poor, it dwindle into dwarfishness. It has no resources in itself, and it cannot go for a supply. It entirely depends upon foreign aid.

Such is a listless Christian. Possessing no fervour of spirit, he never thinks of exerting himself in spiritual matters. He partakes with easy satisfaction of whatever good may come in his way. He supposes that all needful blessings will be brought to him, without the trouble of his seeking them. Because he is planted in the vineyard of the Lord, he seems to think that no effort is requisite to secure the riches of divine grace. He uses no diligence to make his calling and election

sure.* He frequents any means of grace to which he can go without trouble or self-denial. Should these means be animating, and the preaching be rousing, his devotional feelings are raised, and he is satisfied that he makes some progress in religion. When the excitement has ceased, he relapses into his former indifference, and tries to live as he best can on past experience. Poor fare!

These listless Christians are a kind of barometer. Their spirit, like the mercury of a weather-glass, rises and falls according to the pressure of the atmosphere. They depend upon external causes. With no living resources of their own, and making no effort to repair the want of urgent application to the throne of grace,† they receive no real good, and they do no good. These vegetables are the bane of a Church; if there be many in it, it will be offensively lukewarm,‡ and be exposed to the danger of coldness and death.§

The active Christian presents unto God a living sacrifice.|| He offers all his powers in the freshness of their vigour. His energies of mind and body are busy in the work of reli-

**2 Pet. i. 10.* †*Jam. i. 5.* ‡*Rev. iii. 16.* §*Rev. viii. 2.*
||*Rom. xiii. 1.*

gion. Having an ardent love of God in his heart, he is fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.* A sacred glow pervades his whole nature, and stimulates every organ to healthful exercise. Anything about Christ or salvation touches a chord of his heart, and it immediately vibrates with joyful emulation. This can rouse him in the most desponding times. It has an electric influence over the whole circle of his feelings.

Diligence is a quality of the Christian's nature. It is not a surface or partial ebullition, but a general *principle* of an animating kind pervading his whole soul. It affects his *heart* by keeping up the heat of its first love to Christ,—perhaps not so passionate as at the beginning, but more mellow, intense and devoted. It stirs up the *mind* to think upon divine subjects, and causes it to pant for more knowledge and understanding of God's will. It makes the *body* a willing agent to do the work of the Lord,—“I delight to do thy will, O my God.”† The diligent Christian comes to the means of grace, on all available occasions, in full expectation of a present treat and an abiding blessing. He engages in every

*Rom. xii. 11. †Psal. xl. 8

work of love, as if it were a privilege to do so. He shuns no path of duty; for it is his meat and drink to serve the Lord.* How delightful and exhilarating are Christian assemblies when animated by such a spirit! How pleasant to associate and co-operate with people who perform their several parts heartily and cheerfully!

It is vain to profess diligence unless it be manifested. An active person will be employed. Put him where you please, he will find something to do. If work does not come to him, he will seek for work, and get it without difficulty. He finds a way to accomplish what all the listless souls in the world cannot achieve. Before they have ventured to begin, he has finished the enterprise. Whilst they are calling out, "we cannot reach the grapes, they must be sour;" he has found means to taste them and enjoy a sweet repast.

I was in an agricultural district, during a very unpropitious harvest. The crops were cut, but there was no weather fit to dry and house them. The farmers were almost in despair. Their corn would be spoiled. At last, a few bright sunny days were sent to cheer

*John iv. 34.

their drooping spirits. The corn was dried, and it was to be carried home next day, when again it rained. Another fine day: but the barometer indicated change. How the fields glowed with work! you might have thought that all the men and horses in the neighbourhood had been actuated by one magic spirit, to save the crops. Again it rained: and once more the weather brightened: and the same scenes of activity were again displayed. I passed by some fields an hour or two before midnight; and the labourers were still hard at work, though they could scarcely see the waggons on which they were throwing the precious sheafs. I suppose diligence enlightened their eyes and strengthened their arms, to labour till the field was cleared. Next day, it rained; but the corn was safe.

These men were diligent. They actively used the means and time which a merciful Providence vouchsafed, and they gained their object. They did right. If they had been half as diligent in the work of salvation, they would all have been saved to life everlasting. We wish to see a Church redolent with activity *like these harvest fields*; and that every listless professor might feel that he “is weighed in the balances and found wanting.”

II. *Diligence implies carefulness, as opposed to slovenliness.* Did you ever see a slovenly house? All things are in disorder and confusion. Nothing is in the trim that might be expected. There is no appearance of neatness about the family. More dirt is made than cleared away. It is only after a general scrubbing, that it appears at all creditable; and then but for an hour or two. Some feature of uncleanness or disorder re-appears, before the whole is dried and the next meal finished. The house is never comfortable. Yet the inmates are not idle. Theirs is not the condemnation of the sluggard. They are always busy; much engaged in cleaning and putting to rights. But their labour in this respect seems everlasting. The truth is, there is no carefulness in their work, no management, no prudence of arrangement, no wisdom of execution. So they have neither pleasure from the fruits of their toil, nor any relaxation of labour. It is incessant work, without enjoyment.

Such is the picture of the Christian who lives at random: who does not use *method* in his religious concerns, nor maintains that spirit of *watchfulness* so often enjoined in scripture. *You may see him bustling at the means of*

grace ; but the want of a prepared heart and devotional frame, renders them useless. He has been laboriously striving for some good to his soul, and thinks that he has made some improvement, when it seems to slip away, and he loses what he has just gained. His tongue, eyes, or feet have led him astray ; for he set no guard over them. Thus, with all his efforts, which are undoubtedly vigorous, he makes no progress in piety ; he is no credit to the Church, nor comfort to himself. It is the same with his attempts in doing good. However energetic they may be, they are ill-timed or ill-directed ; and they fail of accomplishing the object which was proposed. Owing to some foolish oversight, or careless mis-management, he receives censure under circumstances where he had hoped for commendation or grateful acknowledgment. It all results from want of *prudence*.

Careful Christians have a plan of procedure. They do not work at random, but according to a pre-arranged method. They understand what has to be done, and how it may be best accomplished. They keep what they have acquired, whilst aiming at more, by "watching unto prayer." A Church composed of such

members has not to mourn over repeated blunders and failures of enterprise. It gives no just occasion for reproach. It does not lose one adherent whilst it adds another; nor scatter by prejudice, whilst it gathers with activity. However short it may fall of its expectation, it will be a prosperous Church; and will generally be in favour both with God and all good men.

Diligence includes the idea of perseverance, as an opposite of irregularity. “The hand of diligence maketh rich.”* How? Not by one or two transactions or lucrative speculations. Wealth is acquired by a course of persevering industry. Many little savings are made, and then laid out to advantage. A gradual accumulation takes place, proceeding more rapidly with increased means of gain; until riches seem to flow into the ready reservoir. It is your plodding men of business, intent upon gain, who husband their profits, are always in the market, and never let a good bargain pass by them, that become possessors of worldly wealth.

The same principle of accumulation makes a man of learning. Some persons seem to

*Prov. x iv.

have colossal minds, enlarged with the riches of this world's intelligence. They have, like the busy bee, extracted honey from all the stores of literature, and made the wisdom of ages their own. But these walking Encyclopedias have gained their eminence by untiring application to their favourite pursuit. They have ransacked every book within their reach, and found time for reading through many volumes, whilst others in similar circumstances have had no leisure to read a page. By "pains and patience" they now excel.

This persevering spirit makes a rich and useful christian. The irregular disciple sometimes makes great efforts, but they are not sustained. He has vigorously applied himself for a season to the means of grace ; to prayer, reading, meditation, and hearing the word ; and has succeeded in making a march heavenward. Now he is satisfied with his progress, and sinks into a state of comparative indolence. His gains are not laid out to advantage, but are squandered in listless enjoyment. He overlooks St. Paul's method of proceeding,—
“forgetting those things which are behind,
and reaching forth unto those things which

are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Some well-meaning Christians are careless in watching opportunities of receiving and doing good. Not being *ever intent* upon the one thing needful, they often let good things slip by them.† Their mind is not kept alive to look out for profitable occasions, like a merchantman seeking for goodly pearls.‡ They are avoidably absent from the means of grace, when some great good was received by the diligent. They would have been present, had they expected a season of special blessing; for this was the object of their vehement desire, the very thing which they wished, and for which they would have sacrificed an earthly advantage. But they were not there. They had been praying for some special good, and waiting for it with longing expectation: but through a fitful or indolent temper, they happened to be absent at the very time when God manifested himself to his people. Satan took advantage of their want of regularity, and *threw a snare* around them to keep them away *from the place of blessing.*

*Phil. iii. 13, 14. †Heb. ii. 1. ‡Matt. xiii. 45.

The persevering believer, who is going "from strength to strength,"* lets nothing interfere with his chief work. Ease, business, pleasure must give way to spiritual acquisitions. All other arrangements are made with this *proviso*. He is thankful for mercies of other kinds; but *this* good he must and *will* have. If you only attend to religion at leisure moments, such seasons will rarely appear. You will never find time *to spare*. In making a plan for the ordinary occupations of life, you must *first* subtract a sufficient portion of time and thought for things spiritual. Keep this sacred: let nothing but a real emergency interfere with the devoted seasons. From the remaining part of life, you may sometimes steal an opportunity for adding to your sacred treasures†.

A good woman has received the Saviour under her hospitable roof. Intent upon his heavenly mission of doing good, he forgets the weariness of the road, and his own want of food. He has found some simple souls who are hungering for the bread of life, and he is dealing it out to them, with a measure altogether divine. Now, Martha, now is the time

*Psal. lxxxiv. 7. †Matt. vi. 33. 120.

for being blessed. So fair an opportunity may not again occur. The Master will forgive you, if you delay your preparations for a short time : for he is as much pleased in doing good, as those humble souls are in receiving it.* When the spirit is feasting, the body does not require a sumptuous repast. Christ is accustomed to plain fare : and the best entertainment you can give is a devoted heart. Martha thinks otherwise. Her love and respect for Jesus must be shown in a carnal way ; and she would interfere with his heavenly discourse to make the needful arrangements.† Her intentions are kind and good ; but they are ill-timed. At another season they would be commended. The honour paid to Christ would not have been overlooked by her considerate Lord. He blessed a poor sinner who lavishly poured precious ointment upon his person.‡ But she was at his feet. Martha was in the kitchen, and wished to take Mary with her. Human things must give place to those that are divine. A diligent Church continues steadfast in doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.§

*Acts xx. 35. †Luke x. 40. ‡Mark xiv. 9. §Acts ii. 42.

CHAPTER IV.

ZEAL IN THE CHURCH.

SOME sober Christians are afraid of the word *zeal*. Yet it is a Scriptural term; though often mis-understood and mis-applied. After considering *diligence*, we may more safely touch upon *zeal*.

Zeal comes from the Greek language. Lexicographers derive it from a word which signifies *to boil*. If this derivation be correct, we fear that its true meaning is little known. For, in order to have water in a boiling state, you must have a good fire below, so that the liquid be heated through and through, till every particle reach the degree of 212 Fahrenheit. Since, by a law of hydrostatics, warm particles always ascend, and cold ones descend to take their place near the fire below. By this constant change of position, one part of the fluid can never be much hotter than the rest, and the whole must reach the boiling point before it begins to bubble.

If this be the *zeal of water*, it is different from the ordinary zeal for *religion*. In the latter case, if the surface can be made to sputter, though the lower parts be not even lukewarm, and there be no fire of love at the bottom, it meets with general applause. According to the usual laws of nature, love should certainly pervade the soul before much zeal is manifested. Zeal should be the ebullition of a heart of love. A zealous Church would then resemble that of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and brought forth his fruits, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*

Zeal is *seen* in good works;† in busy exertions for the glory of God and his cause upon earth. A man may be active, careful, and persevering, for the purpose of self-gratification or aggrandisement. All his diligence may be applied to selfish pursuits. He may aim at the sole good of himself and his family. His natural and acquired powers may be in perpetual and steady motion, but all revolving *round the little planet of self*. The more he

*Gal. v. 22, 23. †Jam. ii. 18.

is diligent in accumulation, the more he may be useless to the world.

It is not so in godliness. A true Christian uses his talents to the glory of God. If he do not thus employ them, they will be taken away.* God has ordained that the liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.† Grace is not given for mere pleasure, but for profit. As we freely receive, we must freely give.‡ This is an arrangement of the divine will, and it cannot be altered by the selfishness of human nature. It is part of the plan and covenant of grace, to which we must be subject whether we will or no. We have analogies of it in the book of providence.

The common leech draws a little blood, by retaining which, it soon becomes surfeited. It then looses hold of the object on which it had fixed. It is sickened, instead of strengthened by its repast. But the horse-leech which freely transmits the blood that it receives, retains its liveliness, keeps a fast hold, and cannot be detached except with difficulty.

This illustration describes the difference between a Christian who lives for himself, and

*Matt. xxv. 29. †Prov. xi. 25. ‡Matt. x. 8.

one who lives for the glory of God : between one who only desires to get good, and one who strives to do good ; between those who only wish to be blessed, and those who aim at transmitting blessings to the world.

They little resemble the spirit or life of Christ, who would gladly receive everything and give nothing. They would have the Ministry to work for them ; the Church to pray for them ; the best means to be instituted for their welfare ; Christ to intercede for them ; God to bless them ; the Holy Ghost to revive them ; angels to minister unto them ; the whole universe to consult their good, and all its energies to be in movement for their profit : —whilst themselves, good easy souls, would enjoy the bounties thus imparted, without making any sacrificial return to promote the well-being of others, or assist in the general work of philanthropy ! This cannot be. It is repugnant to the mind of Deity ; contrary to the laws of the moral universe.

The selfish Christian soon becomes languid in his spiritual energies. There is no life in his experience, no fervour in his devotions. As *he finds a giant in the way of every duty* ; so *he soon perceives a lion in the way of every*

privilege.* He becomes fearful of the least exertion,—a spiritual hypochondriac.

A little zeal in God's cause would restore many a languid spirit, and revive many a drooping Church. Self-denial in doing good would give an appetite to the enfeebled digestion of inactive souls. A philanthropic exercise of the spiritual organs, would brace up many feeble limbs, and impart healthful vigour to their flaccid muscles.

Ezekiel's valley of vision represents the dry bones when formed into a skeleton, and clothed with flesh, and resuscitated by the Spirit, as arising and standing up “an exceeding great army.”† It was not an inactive multitude of forms, like breathing clods of the valley, that God's breath raised into life; they were an embattled host, with burnished weapons, and banners floating in the breeze. The imagery is striking and sublime. The Holy Ghost makes a converted man not only a child of God, but a soldier of the Cross. If this military ardour be preserved, and he dwell amongst the ranks of the army, his energies will be strengthened by constant exercise, and he will successfully fight the good fight of

*Prov. 22. 13. †Ezek. 37. 1—10.

faith. He will then be a fit companion for those who have come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

Are you soldiers of the Cross? Let this question be answered after examining the test of your profession. How is a soldier proved? Not by appearing in his regimentals at muster, nor performing his exercises at drill, nor flourishing about in a harmless review. He is proved in the hardships of a long campaign, in weariness and watchings, in forced and tedious marches, in facing danger and wounds and death on the battle-field.†

We have too many dainty and dandy soldiers in the Church of Christ; professors who love the muster and the music, and the well-dressed congregation; but have never adventured to handle the sword of the Spirit, except on a review-day; who have not dared to meet the laugh or sneer or scorn of a godless world;—who cannot say that they have seriously tried to storm one bulwark of darkness, or rescue one poor captive soul from the thralldom of sin;—who have yet done nothing to spread the kingdom of Christ on earth. No wonder

*Rev. vii. 14. †James i. 12.

their experience is so flagging, their evidence so dim, their doubts so strong ! If the truth were told, are you not dead to Christ ? Have you not lost your first love ? Are you sure that the Captain of salvation acknowledges you to belong to the ranks, simply because you retain the uniform ? Since you have no longer the armour or the arms of faith,* is it not a sign that you are really discharged ?

You say that you have embarked with Christ for the good land that is far off.† To which vessel of the fleet of faith do you belong ?‡ Are you a seaman ? These men-of-war do not carry mere passengers ? What then are the signs of your seamanship ? How is a sailor proved ? Not by rowing in a canal or along the shore in a fine summer's day ; where there is no danger of being overtaken by a storm, nor fear of want and weariness, nor hardships and perils to endure ; where he may go for pleasure, to sing and regale himself to his heart's content. The hardy sailor is proved in long voyages across the wide ocean, where he must expect to encounter many storms, to pass sleepless nights of watching in the rudest weather, to

*Ephes. vi. 13—17. †Isa. 33, 17. ‡Cor. xiii. 5.

endure cold and heat, to put up with poor fare and short allowance, to live with rough companions, and to brave all the vicissitudes and dangers of the mighty deep.

There are so many fresh-water seamen aboard the Christian fleet! They find it too hot or too cold, too fine or too foul, too early or too late, to go to worship. Instead of putting on their weather cap and jacket, they tremble at a slight shower and fear the dark. True, it would be shameful for the Minister not to go! The officer on duty must be on deck, though the seamen remain snug in the cabin!

Some parts of the working, also, are heavy, dirty, or mean: others would require you to go aloft. From these duties you beg to be excused. To walk the quarter-deck, when it is fine, and not blowing hard, is very nice. And sometimes you would join in hauling a clean rope. But you will take care not to go out to sea, where there may be danger-duty, or shortness of provisions, or a tough engagement with the enemy. Knowing nothing about these things, you easily imagine that some of the vessel's gear is cumbersome, and that *you could improve the rigging and tackling of the ship, and much increase her sailing powers;*

and you would like to be commander—when the vessel is in harbour !

How different are these specious pretensions from the hardy doings of the primitive Church, who rejoiced when counted worthy to suffer shame and stripes for the name of Jesus ;* who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods in his righteous cause ;† who gladly sacrificed ease, friends, wealth and life,‡ that the Saviour might be glorified and his kingdom advanced. Theirs was a faith that overcame the world.§ They went to the work of the Lord with a hearty zeal, assured that through Christ strengthening them, they could do all things.¶

**Acts v. 41.* †*Heb. x. 34.* ‡*Rev. ii. 10.* ¶*1 Jo. v. 4.* §*2 Cor. xii. 1*

CHAPTER V.

EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH.

The church of Christ is a commonwealth. All the members have an equal right to its blessings. There are no peculiar hereditary privileges. With God, there is no respect of persons.* So, none are exempt from duty. None have the prerogative of being idle. The body of Christ is to be edified, till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.† For this purpose, there must be a co-operation amongst the faithful. Every member must lend a helping hand, according to his means and abilities. Our Lord said, “he that is not with me is against me; he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”‡

In some very ancient times, the chiefs of hostile armies seem to have been the principal

*Rom. ii. 11. †Ephes. iv. 12, 13. ‡Matt. xii. 30.

combatants. The common soldiers looked on, whilst their officers engaged in deadly conflict. The victory or defeat of a whole army depended upon the issue of these public duels. In modern warfare, the case is altered. The officers direct the common soldiers, and lead them on to the battle. These do most of the actual fighting work.

But the old plan is still pursued in some of the Churches of Christ. They have a holy warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. Yet the multitude think that they have nothing to do in this enterprise. They leave the whole work of evangelization to their ministers and a few theological writers. They come to parade once a week, to see a few shots discharged by the preacher: or they rejoice with acclamation when a bomb of powerful learning is thrown into the arena by a divine of their own persuasion. Indeed, until of late years, there was no other mode of combating sin and infidelity but these bombs and long shots. It was of course, quite accidental that an enemy was wounded. Satan and his angels were busy on the opposite side of the field: and as they had free ingress into the parson's magazine, and could foresee th

probable result of the discharge which he was preparing during a whole week, they could raise their defences accordingly, and keep their followers away from the most dangerous points of attack.* Little splinters were soon extracted.† It was quite uncommon to hear of a sinner being killed by a gospel gun.

John Wesley, George Whitfield, Walsh and others, introduced the old puritanical mode of fighting the Lord's battles. It was like the plan adopted by Lord Nelson in combating the French and Spanish navies. The gallant admiral's custom was to sail close up to the enemy, and pour in a deadly broadside. This was the method of converting souls that the worthies of last century so successfully pursued. As they were always cruizing about, at all times and in all kinds of weather, the devil could not foreknow their times of attack. They were in the midst of his fleet, before he thought them to be within a day's sail. Their privateers cut out his merchantmen, before the convoy could fire a gun. When the latter offered any defence, it was quite in vain : they were sure to be silenced or captured by their *invincible* antagonists. Had the members of

*2 Cor. iv. 4. †Mark iv. 15.

the respective Churches joined with these gallant worthies in fighting the good fight of faith, Satan's kingdom would probably have been destroyed. The officers must not be left to fight alone. Every believer should take part in the engagement.

St. Paul, in the wisdom given to him, directed all his converts to seek means whereby they might edify one another.* He likens the Church to a building, which rises to completion by adding materials of the proper kind, and joining them well together. In pursuance of this plan, every Christian must contribute to the general welfare, according to what he hath. Gifts differ.† Some members have *knowledge*; and it is their duty to instruct the ignorant or direct the wanderers.‡ Others have *faith*; by which they may bring down general blessings on the Church and the world.§ Others have *zeal*, which stirs up the lukewarm, and provokes to love and good works.|| Some have gained much *experience* of divine things, in the schools of affliction and meditation: they must therefore, teach the younger,¶ confirm the wavering,|| comfort the

*Rom. xiv. 19. †Rom. xii. 6. ‡Jam. v. 10. ¶Heb. 10, 18. ||Heb.

x. 24. ¶Titus ii. 4. ||Heb. xii. 12, 13.

afflicted.* To others is given the gift of *utterance*, to be used for the glory of God.† A few have *wisdom of government*,‡ and are therefore clearly designed to hold the reins of management in their hands. Many possess *money*, and influence of station or character; which talents should be sedulously employed in the cause of Christ.

All are important, each in his own place. The foot may not say of the hand, I have no need of thee, nor the mouth of the ear, I can do without you.§ All are wanted to make the Church complete, and fill her with the manifold riches of grace.¶ One may not be set up against another, in the light of rival gifts, nor invidious distinctions be drawn as to their relative importance.|| The smallest stone fills a place in the building, which would be unsightly without it. Now it is complete. A poor and humble believer may be useful in the Church.

Shortly after my going to reside in a town of Kent, an obscure member of the Church died. He was a labouring man, and lived two miles distant from the town. His last illness was very short, so that there was no opportunity

**Jam. i. 27.* †*Rom. xii. 7.* ¶*1 Cor. xii. 14—21.* ||*1 Cor. iv. 6.*

of reporting his sickness, until his death was announced. As he was a Wesleyan Methodist, the leader and several members of the little class with which he had been associated were asked concerning his former character. All expressed their regret at his departure in nearly the same terms, "How we shall miss him!" Anxious to know why an obscure man should thus be *missed* from the Church, I enquired the reason. "Oh, he was always in his place, though he had so far to come. And when it was his turn to speak, we always expected to hear something that would do us good; and we were never disappointed. How we shall miss him!" *

Well! methought, I too should like to be *missed*, and my absence from my own little circle to be felt for a short season. When removed to another world, or if laid aside from active duty before that period, I desire to leave a gap in the walls of the building, be it ever so small, that will require filling up by a substitute. Yet it has been sometimes said of the deceased, "*His* death will be no loss to anybody,"—or, "we shall never miss *him*." If not *missed* from earth, is it likely *that you will be found in heaven?*

CHAPTER VI.

TRUTH IN THE CHURCH.

A GOVERNOR once asked “ What is Truth?” And never was a man placed in more favourable circumstances for receiving a satisfactory answer upon this important subject. He was in the presence of the King of Truth,* who is also emphatically called the Wisdom of God.† But there was no sincerity in Pilate’s question. It seems to have immediately struck him, that it might be inconvenient at that time to hear such a lucid description of truth as Jesus was likely to give. So he turned away without affording time for a reply. Pilate has had many followers in every age.

Religious truth is based upon the nature and government of Jehovah. All correct descriptions of his attributes and modes of administration are *truth*. So is every announcement of his will concerning us. These

*John xviii. 37. †1 Cor. i. 24.

truths form the ground of our duties. We may not be able always to see the connection between duty and truth, much less to trace them both up to their source in the divine nature : but every revelation is founded in an infinite reason, and has been framed by perfect wisdom.

You stand upon the bank of a flowing water. You are therefore assured that it has an origin in some higher ground than that which you occupy. Travellers say that it rises through a fissure in a distant mountain. Could you trace it upwards for thousands of miles, and after a tedious journey reach the spot where it emerges from the ground, you could learn no more than you have been taught. You would not discover its real fountain in the deep caverns of earth, nor see how those hidden recesses are supplied with their fulness. You could discover no more than you already know—that the water is there, and that it has flowed down in a certain channel. Why it is there, and how it is there, are impenetrable mysteries. If you are thirsty, drink of the stream, and be satisfied.

Thus it is with many of the truths of our

bible. We prove each of them to be a plain announcement of the Holy Spirit by the mouth of a prophet: but *the reason* of them exists in the divine mind; and we cannot by wisdom find out God.* These truths lie before us in scripture: we receive them by faith, and immediately feel their influence in our hearts. If there be any doubt in our mind respecting the efficacy of a truth, we should inquire of those who have made trial of its merits. They will all declare its effects to be potent. The candid mind yields to their testimony and follows their example.

God alone knows the *perfect* truth. We are of yesterday and know nothing.† There are very few things of which we can learn all the circumstances, relations, and influences. But without this full understanding of a subject, we might think of it improperly, if left to form our opinion of its merits. For instance: it is a fact that Jesus Christ died upon the cross. Jews, Arians, Socinians, Romanists, Protestants, all believe in this circumstance. Yet they essentially differ as to the nature of our Lord, and the reason of *his death*. Through leaning to their own

*1 Cor. i. 21. †Job viii. 9.

understanding, instead of believing God's record concerning his Son, some fall into grievous and fatal errors.

The Lord has not told us *all* truth, but so much as it is good for us to know. He revealed a very few religious truths to the patriarchs and prophets of old; but these were sufficient for their guidance. Without knowing anything about Christ's person, history, or death; but simply trusting that the Messiah should come to save his people from their sins, they were justified. Perhaps, in the state of the case at that distant period of time, they could not have understood more. It was enough for God's purpose and their duty.

Since the time when Christ appeared on earth, the circumstances of the case are altered. The facts of his incarnation and death made it necessary to reveal a new order of religious truths. He taught some of them during his own life: and left the rest to be unfolded after his passion, resurrection, and ascension, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Till these events transpired, there was no basis for new truth, except a prophetic one; which, indeed, had been fre-

quently laid down, but was not understood. In this respect, Socinians and others who complain that the apostles taught more things than Christ did, and that therefore they are not bound to believe them, are greatly defective in their reasoning. Till the facts had actually occurred, and the ground-work of redemption was complete, no reasonable foundation for the doctrines and duties built upon them could appear. So, our Saviour declared to his disciples, that he had many things to say unto them, which they could not then bear to receive: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself;—he shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.* Consequently, Christ gave his apostles power and authority to teach the world what the Holy Ghost should shew them concerning himself and his kingdom.[†]

Since we are ignorant, and very limited in our capacities, it is not likely that the all-wise God should announce more truths than *it is necessary for us to learn*. It is of the *utmost importance that we give earnest heed*

*John xvi. 12—14. †Acta. i. 8.

to these things, lest we should let any of them slip.* If we refuse to admit one scriptural verity, we shall neglect some duties or promises connected with it: and the consequences may be serious, even fatal to our salvation.

You send your servant on an errand to a distant place by an unfrequented way. You therefore give him full instructions about the proper road. Lest he should miss the right track, you inform him of all the bye-paths and cross-roads that occur in that direction. You inform him concerning the proper houses of entertainment, and furnish him with means for procuring refreshment. The dangers of the journey are pointed out to him, with the best means of avoiding or overcoming every difficulty. After giving such ample instructions, you would not think of burdening his memory or perplexing his mind with a description of other routes, or with teaching him the geology, botany, and mineralogy of the country. If he can pick up any of this information, while on his journey, well! but it is foreign to your object. You wish him *faithfully* to fulfil your important mission.

*Heb. ii.1.

Should he forget your description of the roads, he might lose himself. Should he knowingly refuse to follow your directions, or persist in diverging from your plan, he would inevitably go astray. Though he might afterwards regain the road, yet time and strength would be lost through his waywardness.

Thus, the path of salvation is clearly marked out for us in the bible. God has not troubled us by loading us with unnecessary truths. "This is the way, walk ye in it; turn not to the right hand, nor to the left." It is at our peril to neglect the instructions given by our all-gracious Lord. One error may be serious, by leading us on a wrong track. One false turning may conduct us to the broad way that leads to destruction, or to a wide wilderness of conjectures, where the soul shall wander in ceaseless doubtings.

Let us show the force of this argument. We are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.* This is a religious doctrine necessary to be received; for without it, there can be no pardon nor newness of heart. These come from God.† Scripture affirms that God will accept and bless only the penitent believer. This

*Rom. v. i. †Rom. viii. 33 and Acts ii. 38.

announcement of the divine will cannot be altered by man. The counsel of God stands sure.* If, therefore, you wish to receive mercy, and to possess a right spirit, you must come for them in the appointed way ; or else you will labour in vain. And would you keep on the narrow road that leads to life eternal ? You must watch and pray, and cease from sin. He that is born of God doth not commit sin.† If you err from righteousness, you are fallen from grace.

An apprentice to a watchmaker is ordered to make up one of these useful machines. A model of every stage of the process is placed before him. All the pieces of the watch are duly furnished. Should he, however, imagine, that because he puts together the spring, chain and wheels, he may omit some of the little pins or screws, he will ultimately find the baneful effects of his self-will. The movement of the watch will be impeded ; or it will be ill-regulated ; or some of the pieces will fall into disorder, if it be shaken or roughly handled.

Many hearts are in this predicament. A pattern is set before us in the gospel. We

*Psl. xxxiii. 11. +1 John iii. 9.

are commanded to copy the mind of Christ,* or the image of God.† Full directions are given for the proper performance of this duty. Needful grace is promised to work out our salvation.‡ But for want of the pin of love, the screw of temperance, or the catch of long-suffering and meekness, the machine does not go right: and soon becomes of little use. Or, the regulator of the will has not been adjusted: the hands get loose, because the pin of devotion does not confine them to their duty: or the omission of a little oil of grace causes so much friction as to impede the movement. One small neglect may mar a beautiful piece of workmanship. What a pity! Yes: because wilful man thinks that he can do without the guidance of God.

A whole Church may fall into the same evil. By distorting or repudiating one christian truth, it may throw serious obstacles in the way of its own members, and mar its usefulness towards men and beauty before God. Many talk of their “ holy Church,” whilst it disallows the holiness inculcated in scripture, and persecutes those who aim at its attainment. *By substituting an official, hereditary, or sacra-*

*Phil. ii. 5. †Col. iii. 10. ‡Phil. ii. 13.

mental holiness, for the purity and devotion required by God, their Church bears no semblance of a heavenly character: they never think of inward holiness; yet without it, no man shall see the Lord;* and without it, a Church must fall below the standard which Christ will delight to own.

Again: since scripture affirms that God is no respecter of persons,† but, being rich in mercy,‡ gives liberally to all men:§ so, all are invited to partake of his blessings freely,||—to ask and receive that their joy may be full,¶—to be filled with the Spirit,||—to be filled with the fulness of God.2 Here, certain facts respecting the divine character are declared, and duties and promises founded upon these facts are promulgated. Should a Church, however, hold doctrines which place limits upon God's free mercy, it may prevent its followers from reaching to high attainments in godliness, and limit the number of its believing children.

Again: when doctrines of human manufacture are *introduced* into the articles of a creed, the course of divine truth will generally be retarded. The watchmaker's apprentice

*Heb. xii. 14. †Acts x. 34. ‡Ephes. ii. 4. §Rom. i. 5. ||Rev. xxii. 17. ¶John xvi. 24. ||Ephes. v. 18. 2Ephes. iii. 19.

may think it useful to insert a few more screws, pins, and stops, than have been furnished by his master. But they will lessen the simplicity of the works, and may hinder the freedom of their movement. If inserted in some places, they will spoil the motion of the watch.

Popery introduces many errors of this kind into its system. The simple, honest, holy St. Peter would never acknowledge the cumbrous, deformed, impure Church that goes by his name. They hold the intercession of saints, of angels, and of the Virgin Mary. But if it be not affirmed in scripture, that these blessed creatures can hear the prayers of earth, and that they have the office of mediator granted them by God, then a vast amount of religious worship (so called) is used in vain. Nay farther: this fancied intercession of a creature may prevent simple souls from having recourse to Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man.* We here say nothing about the erroneous views which it gives of the omnipresence and infinite condescension and goodness of the God-man. But it *may have the effect of diverting the mind from*

*1 Tim. ii. 5.

the intercession of Christ, and thus leaving its votaries without a real Mediator. By putting too many wheels in the watch, the original adjustment of the train is spoiled.

In the same way, by inserting the doctrine of purgatory, or an intermediate means of purification, between the place of trial and the time of judgment, the importance of the present day of grace may be overlooked ; and those who trust to future and fanciful means of obtaining preparation for heaven will inevitably be lost. Besides, the Church that sanctions such a prospective mode of gaining holiness, is not likely to insist upon the necessity of it during the present life, or to exhibit many specimens of proper sanctification. The spiritual character of its members will be very imperfect.

A small error in a Church may be productive of worse consequences than a great one in a private professor. Because the creed, catechisms, confession of faith, formularies, or liturgies of that Church are connected with the error, which may therefore be propagated through all its members, and handed down to succeeding generations. There is, moreover, great difficulty in getting it corrected.

Vested interests and acts of Parliament, or laws of the State, may interpose to prevent an alteration. The teachers of such a Church cannot set their people right. If they attempt it, they will be discarded as heretics. They may sacrifice every worldly good of their own, and yet do nothing to reform the evil. We find that no Church in the present day will have its doctrines canvassed by its disciples ; although from the diversity of creed in different denominations, some parties *must be wrong*. Yet none suppose it possible that themselves should be in error : none wish for an alteration. “Do you dissent from our creed? Then go away from us. We cannot hear what you may have to say. Our doctrines are of such a character, and we cannot, will not alter.”

On the same grounds, it is difficult for a private member to hold an opinion different from that of the Church to which he belongs. If he avow it, he is looked upon as a troubler of Israel, as one who desires to overturn the truth. Yet, to follow Christ, we must deny *ourselves*, and be ready to lay down all things, *even life itself*, for conscience sake.

"The truth as it is in Jesus,"—"the mind of Christ." That is, to think and judge as Christ thought and judged upon any revealed subject. It implies more than most men suppose. Few attain to this standard. The natural man entertains false views about everything. Perhaps there is not one point on which God and the unrenewed mind think alike. Such words as virtue, truth, wisdom, honour, glory, riches, meekness, temperance, goodness, charity, greatness, nobility, peace, not to mention faith, hope, love, zeal, and other religious graces,—have a very different meaning with God and with fallen man. So entire should be the alteration of our views upon these and other subjects, as that we are exhorted to "become a fool that we may be wise":* that is, to give up all our previous judgments, and come to Christ like little children to learn of him.

For this reason, we do not think that the early divines, erroneously called "Fathers of the Church," were the most proper persons to instruct the christian world. Many of them were heathens in the previous part of their life, and they had been trained in a philosophy

* 1 Cor. iii.18.

quite contrary to the “truth as it is in Jesus.” It was very difficult to rid themselves of all that they had learned, and to give up that pre-eminence in worldly wisdom for which some of them had been celebrated. Moreover, they hoped to proselyte the heathen by exhibiting christianity in a light as little as possible repugnant to their prejudices. It was this admixture of Paganism that ruined the glory of the primitive Church, and is its chief bane to the present day.

To know the whole truth, as set forth in scripture, will require much study and self-denial. We shall have as much to unlearn as to learn: and the former is the most difficult part of the work, because it is so adverse to the pride and vanity of human nature. Many novices catch up two or three truths of the gospel, and immediately think themselves proficient. In their own estimation, they are forthwith able to become teachers of the word. They hope that they are as wise as “the illiterate fishermen of Galilee;” forgetting that these fishermen spent nearly *three years* with Jesus, hanging upon his *words day and night*, and having his divine *example constantly* before them. Yet this

was not sufficient to remove all their prejudices. They needed a farther "unction of the Holy One" to explain Christ's doctrines to their hearts.

Others suppose that the learning of a college will make them adepts in religious truth. It may make them accomplished in the subjects which there engage their attention—chiefly heathen lore, human philosophy, and the philosophy of nature. But this is not the wisdom of God. Who ever heard of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, which contains an epitome of the "mystery of godliness," being made the subject of a close examination in order to obtain the degree of doctor of divinity?

Many congregations, to whom error is not preached, hear only the alphabet of religion. A few leading truths are exhibited to them in different forms, mixed up with a variety of historical, philosophical, and literary facts or disquisitions, so as to vary the discourses: but still only the alphabet or spelling of the gospel is declared. This may lead to error. The people may imagine that what they hear *constitutes* religion; that it is, therefore, very simple and easy to be acquired; and that they need learn nothing more, but are no

well acquainted with the whole matter. The bible does not exhibit the truth in this light. It bids us "strive," "labour," "meditate," "continue steadfast in learning," and "forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth to those which are before, press toward the mark."

To induce a Church to aim at the proper standard of piety, we must set before them a clear description of that character which they should reach. What is the will of God concerning his people? What will he help them to become? What is the image of his Son to which they should conform?*

To make a right copy, you must keep the original picture before you, and study both its general character and its particular features. You wish a miniature of Christ engraven on your heart. The Holy Spirit is the artist:† but he only draws those lines of righteousness which you earnestly desire and ask in faith. Whilst with open face you behold in the gospel glass the glory of the Lord, you are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.‡ But *what is that glory?* There must be not only

**I Jo.* ii. 6. †*Heb.* x. xvi. ‡*Cor.* iii. 18.

a first sketch, but a filling up of the christian virtues. Every liniament of character must be depicted: the lights and shades of the active and passive graces, must be put in. If heavenly truth is to be copied by men, a heavenly standard must be ever exhibited to the Church.

Having obtained a clear and comprehensive view of the work to be accomplished, the proper manner of executing it must be known. It is a work of God as well as of man;* therefore, it is necessary to understand how He will condescend to operate. If he has laid down a certain mode of procedure as that which is alone agreeable to his will, we must pursue this method. We shall fail if we adopt any other plans. We may strive to enter upon the narrow road; but if not willing to pass through the strait gate, we shall strive in vain. We may fight against sin, but if not in God's method, we shall be as one that beats the air.†

The true way, from the threshold of repentance to the gate of paradise, is marked out in scripture. It is Christ's road of salvation, paved with precious promises. A new bles-

*Phil. ii. 12, 13. †1 Cor. ix. 26.

ing is found at each succeeding stone of the way. As soon as the penitent sinner steps inside the gate, he rests the foot of his faith on a promised pardon, and he is justified. His other foot, at the same time treads upon the promise of divine grace, and his spirit is renewed. So, as he proceeds with successive acts of faith, he traverses the shining way, and is filled with the fruits of righteousness. But off this road of truth, there is no proffered blessing. This is God's causeway, all the stones of which have been brought from the quarries of heaven. Therefore they are vivifying stones. Any other way is one of man's devising, and of earthly manufacture. You may walk upon it without ceasing, and perform services of self-will without number; but they will not recommend you to God, nor advance you toward heaven. Hence the vast importance of having the *true way* held by a Church. It is the only path of peace, illumined by God's smile, and cheered with his constant benediction.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LIGHT OF THE CHURCH.

OUR Saviour said, "as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."* When he left this earth, he did not intend that our race should be involved in darkness; so he deputed the Church to take his place in illuminating mankind.† "Ye are the light of the world."‡ By shining into his people§ he makes them children of the light,|| that, during the absence of the sun of righteousness, they may be as moral moons, scattering the darkness of sin and ignorance. They receive truth and grace from the Lord; and reflect them on the world around. They shine with borrowed rays; but these beams are divine.

You must partake of the light, in order to show forth its lustre. We do not look for an example of goodness from those who are ex-

*John ix. 5. †John xvii. 18. ‡Matt. v. 14. ¶2 Cor. iv. 6.

||Ephes. v. 14.

nally minded. It would be inconsiderate to expect it, until their nature be changed: Worldly principles will produce corresponding effects. But a religious profession should exhibit a heavenly conversation.*

Sometimes, when we speak of the excellent graces of piety, and the blessed fruits of the Spirit wrought in the regenerate soul, we are answered with the remark, "I never saw such a character; indeed, I never met with one in all my life." But where did you go to look for a pattern of godliness? Did you think to find it at the ball-room, the theatre, the horse-race, or the public-house? Did you search for piety amongst the works of worldliness? Did you think that light may be found in the regions of darkness? Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?† Common consistency demands that you look elsewhere for the beauties of holiness. You must seek it amongst those who have become separate;‡ who have really renounced "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world and all the sinful lusts of the flesh;" who are taking up their cross and *following Jesus*. You must also look at such specimens of these professors as the Heads of

*Phil. i. 27, and iii. 20. †Matt. vii. 16. ‡2 Cor. vi. 17.

their Church acknowledge to be genuine. For many disciples who have left their first love* still remain in the Churches of Christ, and others who are maimed by satan, are retained with a hope that they may yet be healed.† All are not Israel who are of Israel.

It is only fair that you be directed by "the elders" to proper examples of religious experience. Upon entering a munufactory, we see a variety of goods in all stages of progress toward completion. We should not judge of the finished article from a few imperfect specimens that are lying about in the rough. We allow the chiefs of the establishment to shew us their best goods, and we form our general opinion from an examination of their merits. Oh ! that men would exhibit the same candour in judging of christianity ! True, a person skilled in the business of the factory, might shew us some incomplete pieces of workmanship, of which he thinks very highly, and which he prognosticates will turn out well, from the known diligence of the mechanic who has them in hand. So we can exhibit many beautiful samples of youthful piety, who are now a credit to the Church as juvenile mem-

*Rev. ii. 4. †Heb. xii. 18.

bers, and who will probably become princes among the Israel of God : but they are not yet finished specimens of godliness. Other pieces of work are marked with slight defects, which we readily perceive, but it is not our duty to expose.* Light shines brightest in the darkest night. Perhaps, if you wish to see the finest samples of the grace of God, we should have to lead you to the bedside of sickness or infirmity, in some obscure abode of lonely poverty. There, in a destitution of all earthly good, we could point out the most glorious triumphs of divine grace, in giving patience amid suffering, peaceful composure in nature's distress, and thankfulness in the midst of want; whilst hope sparkles in the closing eye, and lights up the dying countenance with a heavenly smile.

There are lights of all sizes and degrees of lustre in the Church of Christ. Some are like planets to illumine a hemisphere ; others like lamps of a city, or of a street ; others are candles in a house ; whilst the little taper in a garret or a cellar answers the purpose of *giving light* to those who come within the *range of its beams*. Piety has its converts

*1 Peter iv. 8.

amongst all classes and conditions of men. It has no hermits. "No (wise) man when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light."* Christ wishes the excellency of his doctrine to be manifested in the palace, the senate-house, the market, the shop, the counting-house, the parlour, and the kitchen. Have you received the light? Then shine in that orbit, large or small, where providence has placed you. Fill the circle of your influence with the grace of a pure profession. Let all that know you, see that you belong to Jesus, and that you have been with him.† Let every word and action bear the character of light.

It is necessary that there be example as well as precept. We test a professed truth by actual experiment. We judge of the value of a discovery by its utility. However brilliant the description of it that may be given, and however sanguine the expectations that may be formed concerning it; yet if it fail to answer the avowed purpose, we discard it as a matter of fiction. One failure in experiment

*Luke viii. 16. †Acts iv. 13.

will do more to damage a theory, than a hundred arguments of an avowed opponent. Men trust the immediate use of their eyes and ears, more than a long process of deliberate reasoning.

Were all the professors of the Christian faith consistent in setting forth a bright example to the world, there would be little need of erudite volumes to prove the divinity of the Gospel. It would bear its own evidence on its front. Its utility would be at once acknowledged. No one would attempt to dispute its authority. Who would try to prove that the sun did not shine at mid-day? Who, upon entering a room lighted by a single candle, would contend that it was useless, and that darkness would be as profitable to its industrious inmates?

To be a professor of godliness, without exhibiting its power, is actually to vilify it before mankind. It is to depict religion as a lifeless thing, an inergetic theory. It is practically to say, "I do not believe in the truth of my religion." You declare that you *fear an Almighty God*, and are endeavouring to serve *Him*; whilst every one sees that you daily break his commandments and disregard

his promises ! Are we to believe your mouth or your life : for they speak contrary things ? You affirm that you hope for heaven, and wish above all things to reach that land of glory and immortality : but your daily conduct says that you are only intent upon the gains of this fleeting life ! In your creed, you love your neighbour ; but all your acquaintances think that you only care for yourself. In your prayers to God, sin is avowed to be a terrible thing, for which you profess to be heartily sorry ; the very memory of it is grievous to you, the burden of it is intolerable : —yet you tell a lie in a matter of business, or cheat like your ungodly neighbours, or speak unkind words of a brother, or retail a little scandal with evident zest ! You say or sing “a day in thy courts is better than a thousand ;”* yet a party of pleasure, or a meeting of friends, or a profitable bargain, or the gain of a few pence, will at any time keep you from the house of God on a week-day. To frequent the sanctuary on a sabbath is no criterion by which we can judge of your devotion. To work on that day would be disreputable, and would be annoying to yourself and

* Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

family. The test of your piety takes place when you cannot at once serve God and mammon :—which do you really choose ?

The Churches should be living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;* each member exhibiting “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Ungodly men, who will not read their bible, would then be compelled to see the virtues of the Spirit in the life and conversation of those whom He animates. We do not say, that each is expected to set forth all the graces of Christianity in their full power and beauty. That perfect example was afforded by Immanuel ; and perhaps no other such specimen will ever be offered on earth. But each letter written by the Holy Ghost will have some peculiar grace of penmanship, and depict some beauty of the gospel. Or else, why was it written? And though each may not exhibit the whole excellency of piety, yet whatever he does shew forth should be correct. It should be truth, if not the whole truth.

Imagine the contrary of this position. The *world is studying* in the Church the goodness and power of religion. But unfortunately, each

*2 Cor. iii. 2.

page of the book contains some error, some misconstruction of the truth, some false opinion, some palpable inconsistency or flagrant unrighteousness. The pages, moreover, do not correspond; and one strongly contradicts what another has confidently affirmed. In those places where the truth is really described, the writing is frequently defaced, or the penmanship marred by crooked strokes and blots. Some of the characters are defective, the t's want crossing, the i's need pointing, and there is a strange lack of stops and capitals. The writing is true, but it is not easily legible; and the simple and unlearned make many blunders in endeavouring to read it. This is specially the case, when the text is encumbered with words of old philosophy, which need a pagan dictionary to explain their meaning; or with "old wives' fables" of apostolical succession, and "traditions of the elders" or "monkish fathers of the Church." Oh, when shall the world read in the Church the manifold wisdom and grace of God !

"If the light that is in thee become darkness, how great is that darkness!" It is a melancholy circumstance when any useful light is extinguished. It may be a most calamitous

event. Public rioters try to put out the lamps of a city, that their atrocious purposes may be more easily executed in the dark. So, satan and his angels thrust hard at the "elders of the Church," because those evil spirits then hope more easily to sack the city of our God.

Beacons are placed along the coast of our country, and on every dangerous rock or shoal, to give warning to the passing mariner. Should one of these beacons be removed, a shipwreck might take place. Or, should the light which used to point out the side of a deep channel be now fixed in the middle of a shoal, it might prove the death of many voyagers. Faithless professor! you were one of those beacons placed by Christ along the rugged shores of life. The clear profession which you once exhibited was the sign of a safe channel beside you; and those who kept near you were cheered by your light, and blessed its benign author. Where are you now? We see you not as heretofore. Is your lamp gone out? Or is it removed to a shoal of worldliness, a rock of offence, or a quicksand of pleasure? Beware, lest you ruin others *along with yourself*, and the blood of souls be required at your hands!

CHAPTER VIII.

POWER IN THE CHURCH.

CHRIST is head of the Church. He has been divinely set upon the holy hill of Sion.* None can dethrone Him from his supremacy.† It hath pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell, and he is head over all things to his body, which is the Church. ‡As well attempt to pluck the sun from the firmament of heaven, as to dethrone Christ from his headship.

But though you cannot prevent his being over the Church, you may separate the Church from him. You may not be able to take away the head from the body, but you may destroy that communication with the head, by which the body derives all its life and energy. And what would a body be apart from the influences of its head? If it could exist in such a state, it would be a mere vegetable, without movement or sensibility.

*Ps. ii. 6. †1-5. ‡Ephes. i. 22, 23.

Such is a Church, when it has no spiritual communion with its heavenly master. It may have the name, and form, and ordinances of christianity ; but it has none of the life or power of godliness.* It grovels on the earth, from which it derives all its enjoyment ; intent upon the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life. It has no spiritual happiness. It has no ravishing sight of the glories of the upper sanctuary, or of the land that is afar off. The music of the promises creates no joyous excitement. The words of salvation are not felt to be sweeter than honey—honey dropping from the comb.† The praises of God raise no more emotion than the notes of a common song. The solemn services of the sanctuary are performed as by an automaton ; they are a mere exhibition.

But if a Church be joined by the proper organs of communication with its divine head, it will be a living, sprightly, well-directed, and happy Church. In Christ are the riches of grace ;‡ that is, abundant grace, and grace of every description which can suit his members. Out of his fulness we receive a

*John xv. 4, 6. †Ps. xix. 10. ‡Ephes. ii. 7.

constant supply.* Riches of grace ! These riches are heavenly. They are the fruit of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. It is a divine goodness, and therefore able to satisfy all created spirits. Every thing that belongs to heaven and bears the mark of the heavenly, must be happy. So that if a Church be filled with the varied and superabounding grace of Christ, it must be a prosperous and blessed people. "All my springs are in thee." If its sources of life, comfort, peace, and prosperity be all divine, nothing can detract from its real power or destroy its happiness. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat ; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."†

But to have Christ in the Church is more than to have him there in name and in the articles of our creed. He does not dwell in the walls of a building, nor in pews, chalices, vestments ; nor within the boards of a book.

*John i. 16. †Habuk. iii. 17, 18.

These have no attraction for the Saviour. He dwells in the hearts of men. "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."* Christ is, therefore, in a Church, when he abides in the hearts of its members. If he be not found in any of the people, they are a reprobate Church.† They are counterfeit coin, which may pass current with children, or with dupes, but cannot for a moment deceive the piercing glance of Him who searches the reins and hearts.‡

Christ dwells in the heart by faith.§ True faith brings the Saviour into the soul, and keeps him there.|| When we believe in Christ, we receive the blessings of his atonement, and we know that he abides in us, by the spirit which he hath given us.¶ You have got a bud of a valuable kind which you wish to see bringing forth fruit: but it is useless of itself, and if you plant it alone, there is no hope of its growing. But you find a healthy stem in your garden, just ready for a graft. So you make an incision, and

*² Cor. vi. 16. †² Cor. xiii. 5. ‡Rev. ii. 23. ¶Ephes. iii. 17.

||Heb. x. 38. ¶1 John iii. 24.

insert the nursling, and protect it from injury : and it soons receives nourishment from the sap of the stock, and shoots forth, and becomes a luxuriant branch. So Jesus Christ is the heavenly tree, and his pierced side is the opening into which we are inserted by faith ; and by receiving of his spirit, we live unto God, grow in grace, and bring forth fruits of righteousness.* Here is a glorious tree, of God's own planting, with a multitude of healthy boughs, bearing different kinds of fruit, according to the natural and spiritual powers of each ; but all drawing their life from the same sap, which flows in abundance to every part. It springs from a divine root, and can never be exhausted : it is of heavenly original, and therefore pure and immortal. In truth, it is the love of God, which gives life and happiness to the celestial hosts. They may receive the grace more directly from the root : we obtain it mediately, through Immanuel's stem.

It is not enough to have Christ amongst you ; you must feed upon his body.† That is, you must partake of the blessings which he died to procure. These are called promises,

*John xiv. 5. †John vi. 53.

or things promised, which are freely given to all who apply for them in the appointed way.* The Minister, in preaching Christ, holds out in God's name and on his behalf, the offers of mercy and salvation :† then, faith in the hearer appropriates these blessings to himself. He knows and feels that they are for him, as well as for others :‡ and when he honours God by trusting his declared willingness to bestow them, God honours his faith by imparting the desired good. All is of grace, through faith. When we believe, God gives.

The promises are to be received and enjoyed. They are the family portion ; the heavenly table spread for us in the wilderness of life.§ They are not preached, to be looked at and admired ; but that they may be fed upon by the hearers. It is a feast of fat things,|| prepared with infinite care by our all-wise and gracious Redeemer. The children of his family sit down to eat and drink, and bless his name. They rise up satisfied and nourished, and pursue their way rejoicing ; going from strength to strength, till each appears before *God in Zion above.*¶

*Rev. xxii. 17. +2 Cor. v. 20. †Rom. iii. 22. ¶Ps. xxxiii. 5.

||Isa. xxv. 6. ¶Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

A wise man has said, that "knowledge is power." Not *necessarily* so; but, wherever it exists, it may be employed as an effective instrument of good or evil. So it is with the knowledge of Christ and things divine. It does not absolutely confer grace and spiritual energy. A congregation may possess a large amount of religious information, and yet be very destitute of vital godliness. Scripture tells us of a Church to whom the Gospel was faithfully delivered, but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

Philosophers say, that the light of the sun is of a phosphoric nature, and is not necessarily attended with heat. There must be an atmosphere of a certain density, with which the refracted rays of light are mixed, in order to generate warmth. Thus we find that on the top of a high mountain, where the air is rarefied, it is far colder than in the valley. Though the sun's beams are bright, and the sky cloudless, and you are so many miles nearer to the orb of day, and there is not a vapour to dusk the azure blue of heaven's expanse; yet there is a chilliness in the atmosphere, producing a

*Heb. iv. 2.

total want of genial feeling. The light is lonely, like moonshine. So it is in a Church, where the sun of righteousness shines, and his healing beams are brightly displayed, but there is no atmosphere of faith with which the word mixes. It gives no warmth nor energy to the soul. A Church may have much light, and but little power.

When the members of a Church walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they are multiplied.* The spiritual influences brought down by faith and prayer, increase the graces of the faithful, and soften the hearts of unbelievers. The only way by which we can be assured that Christ dwells in a Church, is by the signs of his walking amongst them; the holiness of its members being increased, and the number of believers being augmented.

A Church should have Christ with them, as well as in them. They are not only to have his saving influences, but also his powerful assistance. It is possible to apprehend a little of the one, without much of the other. We *may believe* for the former, yet not sufficiently for the latter. We may trust Jesus to bestow

*Acts ix. 31.

his saving grace, yet be somewhat distrustful of his providential guidance, and his constant interference on our behalf. He is not only Saviour, but Lord ;—head over all things to his Church. He is in heaven, enthroned in glory ; yet also on earth, to succour and to save his followers. “ Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”* We should never forget our Lord’s omnipresence, omniscience,† and omnipotence.‡

The night was dark and dreary. A tempestuous wind curled the raging billows, and tossed their foaming waves on high. All the demons of the air seemed to be present, with the prince of darkness at their head ;§ anxious to destroy a little vessel, which was trying to made head-way against the gale. The mariners, almost spent with toil, could make no progress. Nor could the powers of evil upset or sink that little bark. A few men were in it; but they were the hope of the christian Church. Could they only be drowned, the prospects of the world might be changed. Satan and his angels made a desperate effort to accomplish this purpose ; but they could not succeed.

*Matt. xxviii. 20. †John xxi. 17. ‡Matt. xxviii. 18.

‡Ephes. ii. 2

Why does that boat continue to swim, though demons are trying to sink her? With less trouble, they have overwhelmed many navies! So they try again: for though they knew the sailors to be bold and hardy, yet they see they are but men, and no earthly help is near. True, no human aid is nigh. But who is yon lone man on the top of the mountain afar off, kneeling in prayer to his heavenly Father:^{*} yet his eye is intently fixed[†] on that little vessel which contains his disciples; and his word of power upholds it;[‡] and it cannot perish whilst Christ bids it live.

Satan! you are once more foiled! You thought to kill the servants, but you forgot their divine Master! You were looking at the size and build of the vessel, not at the hand which encircled it! At last, a faint form, like a flitting shadow, passed over the deep, and lightly trod the foaming billows. It was the man of sorrows,[§] but also the man of love.^{||} The disciples saw a dark shade and shrieked; till a well-known voice exclaimed, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

When Satan heard that voice, and saw Jesus enter into the ship, he fled away, and his

[¶]Matt. xiv. 23. [†]Deut. xi. 12. [‡]Heb. i. 3. Isa. i. 3. ^{||}John xv. 13.

legions after him ; and immediately, there was a great calm.

When the same Jesus, after his ascension to heaven, gave Paul an injunction to preach the gospel in Corinth, one of the chief seats of pagan luxury, vice, and idolatry, he bade him “fear not, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.”* A large and prosperous Church was, therefore, raised in that city. It is the power of Christ which makes a flourishing Church. But that power must be apprehended by faith. It will not suffice to say, “God is with us;” we must work together with God. We must use our divine partner. Do we really understand what is meant by “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead?”†

A great deal of power in nature, available to man for his convenience and profit, has been lying dormant for thousands of years. In the present age, when mind is beginning to wake up and explore the secrets of nature,

*Acts xviii. 10. †Ephes. i. 18, 19.

repositories, so much has already been discovered, as to change some of the modes and habits of human society. The powers of steam, and electricity, and galvanism, were formerly the same as at present, but they were unknown and remained useless to men. Their properties having been found out, art now employs them to great advantage. A few more such discoveries, and the whole aspect of the civilized world will be altered. It is the evolution of latent power, created for man's use, placed within reach of his mental grasp. Whilst mind was inactive, the good was not attained : it was beyond the reach of a listless and grovelling spirit. So long as war, and priestcraft, and syllogisms, occupied the intellectual powers, true science could not be gained. It needs peace, and liberty, and truth, to explore the arcana of nature.

So it is with the kingdom of grace. Treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Christ.* It is evident, that a divine unction and power obtained from him were possessed by the primitive Church, of which *we* know little, save the historical account. Such prodigies of faith, self-denial, and success were

*Col. ii. 3.

transacted in apostolic days, that the very narrative overawes us. We read it with admiration and gratitude, as we do the wonders of creation and redemption. We look upon those doings as objects of astonishment, not of imitation. Yet the Lord of the Church is the same, and the Spirit is not changed. Prophecy also tells us of glorious days again to come; when the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days;*—when he that is feeble shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them;†—when a nation shall be born at once;‡—and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.§ There is a latent *power* in Christ, our divine head, which is to be apprehended by the Church. But it will require much light, holiness, and faith, to ransack these arcana of grace.

It is said, that one of the last expressions of the dying Wesley was, “the best of all is, God is with us.” No wonder! He could number the converts of his ministry by thou-

*Isa. xxx. 26. †Zech. xii. 8. ‡Isa. lxvi. 8. §Isa. xi. 9.

sands. By his exertions and those of his coadjutors and cotemporaries, the religious aspect of Britain was changed, and a day-star rose upon the world. He understood what was meant by having God with him. So did Gideon,* when, with three hundred men like himself, he discomfited the whole army of the Midianites. And the “day of the Lord shall be as the day of Midian.”† We want not only the cross of Christ, but the crown of Christ amongst us.‡

Bring Jesus with all his fulness into the Church, and it will be rich and mighty. He will be their glory and defence. Happy shalt thou be, O Israel, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency: and thine enemies shall be subdued unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places.§

CHAPTER IX.

HOLINESS IN THE CHURCH.

Luther described "Justification by faith" as being *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*, the main doctrine by which a Church stands or falls. We are not sure that this declaration was entirely correct. Although this doctrine is of vital importance to true godliness, yet we should hesitate to place its reception as the standard of our religion. It is the strait gate through which alone we can enter upon the narrow road;* but it does not necessarily include all the blessings and virtues of that way. It is the power by which we begin to work out our salvation with fear and trembling;† but it is not the entire work. Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are received into God's favour and obtain the gift of the Holy Ghost.‡

*Matt. vii. 14. †Phil. ii. 12. ‡Acts ii. 38.

so that the work of grace is then begun in our hearts; but the beginning of a christian's career is not the same as its completion.

The evil consequences of making a low standard of religion are manifested in the Lutheran and other Protestant Churches; which still retain this important article in their creed; but which are fallen into spiritual apathy and lifelessness. Such a course is natural to man. He will generally come short of the mark set before him. A Church will invariably do so: for it always contains a number of sluggish and half-hearted adherents. Luther's declaration that a revival of religion would only last for a century, has been verified in those cases where the people were directed to low attainments in grace.

We find no fault with the noble army of reformers from popery. They performed a great and glorious work, in purifying the vestibule of godliness from the mass of moral filth and folly which had been accumulating for ages, and had nearly blocked up the way of mercy from mankind. Theirs was a valiant struggle with the powers of darkness, to place *the rudiments* of christianity in a clear and *convincing light*. Their successors ought im-

mediately to have followed up their labours, and exposed to view the whole mystery of godliness. This was neglected: and the reformed Churches, after several partial arousings, sunk into a profound stupor, which might have been followed by another night of superstition; had not the worthies of last century risen to call them forth to glorious truth and liberty.

This last reformation has been an eventful one. Instead of succumbing after a career of one hundred years, it is only now putting forth the powers of manhood, and spreading salvation throughout the world. Mr. Wesley placed the standard of piety at its proper height —where the Holy Ghost put it. He was not satisfied with exhibiting the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; but “going on to perfection,”* he expounded the whole counsel of God. Though many of the British Churches at first cavilled with this resuscitated doctrine of holiness or personal purity, and even opposed our reformer on this great subject, yet as they have become more acquainted with the scriptures of truth, they have gradually ceased their hostility: and where they do not yet ac-

*Heb. vi. 1.

knowledge the possibility of quite reaching this mark, they regard it as very desirable, and a part of our duty to aim at its attainment.

There are two main reasons for the holiness of a Church, the glory of God its Saviour, and the extension of its usefulness.

"Be ye holy, for I am holy."* "Holiness becometh thy house for ever."† The first of these texts assigns as the grand *reason* for this qualification in the Church, that it is a moral attribute of Deity, who cannot be pleased with anything contrary to his own nature. The second text declares it to be a matter of consistency, that those who profess to belong to God, and hope for a continuance of his manifested favour, should imitate his holiness.

A great prince is about to erect a palace, where he may hold levees, give entertainments, and receive the petitions of his subjects. It will be expected that the style of the building correspond with the magnificence of the sovereign. If there be not much tapestry or gilding in the apartments, yet they will be elegant, tasteful, and chastely adorned. Anything like meanness, defilement, or coarse workmanship would be altogether unsuitable

*Lev. xi. 44, and i. Pet. 15, 16. †Ps. xciii. 5.

to the rank and character of an august monarch.

The temple of Jerusalem used to be emphatically called "the house of God" on earth. Not because of its pompous ritual and magnificent ceremonials: but because Jehovah promised to manifest himself there to the assembled worshippers, to accept their offerings, and answer their prayers. It was, therefore, erected, and its services ordered according to the divine will. Agreeable to the nature of the high and holy Lord who promised to tenant that earthly sanctuary, the whole arrangements were conducted in a manner perfectly unique for purity and solemnity. King David who gathered together the money and materials necessary for the building, was not permitted to be its founder, because he had previously been engaged in war. Hands that never wielded any sword but that of justice, that were never contaminated with the blood of man must found the temple for a holy and merciful God. No noise of hammers, or axes, or chisels might be heard in rearing the edifice, or fixing its furniture.* *The stones and planks and staves were all*

*1 Kings vi.7.

prepared at a distance from the hallowed ground, and then looped or dovetailed together with noiseless skill. The gold and silver employed in its ornaments and vessels of service were pure metal, unadulterated, unalloyed, and used with lavish profusion. The oil of its lamps was virgin oil. The sacred garments were of finest linen, of purest white. The offerings must be victims of a clean kind, without spot or blemish. The little cake of meal, presented in thanksgiving by the poor, must be of fine flour, seasoned with salt. The priests must wash themselves and put on pontifical robes of God's own pattern, before entering upon their ministrations. No sign of mourning might appear within the sacred walls. When day-light was departing, its place must be supplied by brilliant lamps from candelabra of shining gold.

Such a temple "became" the Holy One of Israel. But all this was emblematical of nobler temples and a spiritual worship. Those types and shadows were eclipsed in the glory of a heavenly dispensation. "Ye are the *temples of the living God*; as God hath said, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my*

people."*—"The very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."† It is plain, therefore, that the standard laid down by God for his people, is personal purity and entire devotion to his blessed will.

"Let every one that nameth (or calleth himself by) the name of Christ depart from iniquity."‡ Would any respectable manufacturer like to see his name stamped or imprinted on blemished, imperfect, or inferior goods? Would he not at once disavow them, and declare that a forgery had been committed? In those kinds of hardware, where it is necessary to have a variety of the same article at different prices, so as to suit all demands of the market, it is common for a respectable manufacturer to put a fictitious name on the inferior goods, and to impress his own mark on such as will do him credit. The one are known to be cheap, worth little, unwarranted. The other will bear public inspection, and may be sent to any market of the civilized world.

*2 Cor. vi. 16. †1 Thess. v. 23, 24. ‡2 Tim. ii. 19.

We call ourselves christians. Does Christ like to see his honoured name on a vile or unsanctified heart, not to say an unholy and inconsistent life? The honour of Christ demands that his people do not consider holiness as being merely a desirable acquisition, a great privilege, the perquisite of a chosen few, a work to be generally performed at death;—but a solemn duty binding upon all who profess to be his followers.*

Once more: the work of grace in man is wrought by the Holy Spirit.† He is the agent.‡ Does, then, an unholy heart reflect any credit on the divine workman? How do you judge of an artizan whose work is full of slips and flaws, of rough sides and ragged corners, of pieces ill-assorted and badly joined? When the Holy Ghost renews a fallen spirit, and bestows upon it the light and love of heaven's own sanctuary, and raises it to a noble and elevated rank in the scale of being,§ is it likely that he wishes it to continue impure and carnal? When he commands, beseeches, and promises to help believers to be holy, does he announce *the truth*; or is it only some poetic fiction to amuse a wretched world? With

* Pet. ii. 9. †John iii. 6. ‡Cor. iii. 18. §John iii. 1.

whom does the fault lie, that the work is not accomplished?

We remember to have seen an agriculturist destroying the heath that covered the side of a Scottish mountain. The land was wanted for pasturing flocks: but the grass was entirely choked, like the seed mentioned in our Saviour's parable of the sower. Various means had been tried for extirpating the luxurious heath. At last, a new and successful plan was adopted, by means of a spring of water which issued from an elevated part of the landscape. This stream formerly ran to waste. Now it was directed into a little trench carefully made along the side of the hilly ridge. This being stopped at the farther end, soon filled with water, which gently overflowed and moistened the lower part of the mountain. It was found that this constant irrigation killed the heath, and made the grass to grow. In a short time, the mountain side was covered with verdure and with grazing flocks.

In a similar way, the sin of man's heart may be destroyed. The corruptions of our nature are too deep-seated and far spread to be exterminated by human means. Neither digging, nor uprooting, nor burning will avail

in this difficult case. But there is a stream the spirit, a well of water springing up in everlasting life,* which may be brought overflow the heart, and to do for us what could never do for ourselves. This fountain of life is sin-killing and soul-reviving. It purifies from iniquity, and waters the seed the word; thus changing the barren land into a verdant pasture-ground.†

We may not plead the infirmities of human nature, when the almighty God offers to assist our weak yet ardent endeavours.‡ You cannot destroy the tree of sin. It is too strong a tough for earthly instruments to cut it down. But heaven's own electricity offers to blast it with a steady hand you fix the conducting wire, and with a believing heart you ask the fire to fall, "Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence."

The usefulness of the Church in the world another reason for its being holy.

In making a complicated machine, great attention must be paid to the construction of each of its parts. It is not sufficient that they be rightly joined together, so that each kee-

*Jo. 4. 14. †Isa. 55. 13. ‡Gen. 17. 1. §Isa. 64. 1.

its proper place ; but the pieces must be correctly formed, so that they may be true to each other in the general adjustment. If not, they will either grate in their movements, or lose much of their power by imperfect action. And the more complex a machine is, and the greater variety of functions which it has to perform, the more accurate must be the formation of its component parts. Who could make a perfect or well-working engine with imperfect pieces ?

The Church of Christ is intended to be an elaborate and beautiful machine for glorifying God and working good amongst men.* It is composed, as we have seen, of a great variety of members—who are all necessary to accomplish the designs of the heavenly artificer. Must not each be right in himself, before they can make a perfect whole ?† Shall Christ work with an incomplete and grating piece of machinery ? We think that the very reason why the Church does not convert the world is because its members are not correct in themselves, and not rightly adjusted ; so that the vast power of divine grace which offers to move them cannot be used to advantage.

*Ephes. 2. 10. †Ephes. 4. 12, 13.

In the case of the primitive Corinthians, we see that powerful means of usefulness were inefficient without love and holiness amongst themselves. Nay, the very abundance of gifts which were so profusely granted to them, became the cause of confusion and disorder. They rejoiced in their spiritual might, but it was in a kind of revelry, rather than in patient working for the glory of God. Other Churches had similar gifts, but their personal attainments in grace prevented the evils which prevailed in Corinth.

Take an illustration from the favourite art of the day, railway travelling. Everybody knows that not only must the engine be complete and well supplied with steam, and the rails be clear of all impediments, but that the separate carriages must be strong and securely linked together. If one axle-tree break, or one of the linking chains be snapped, the safety of the train may be endangered, or part of it left far behind. The great power of the engine will only increase the risk, when all is "not right." Under such circumstances, it is better to have *little steam on, and to go very slowly.*

Is it not possible that the cause of the Lord's arm not being made bare, and of Pentecost's

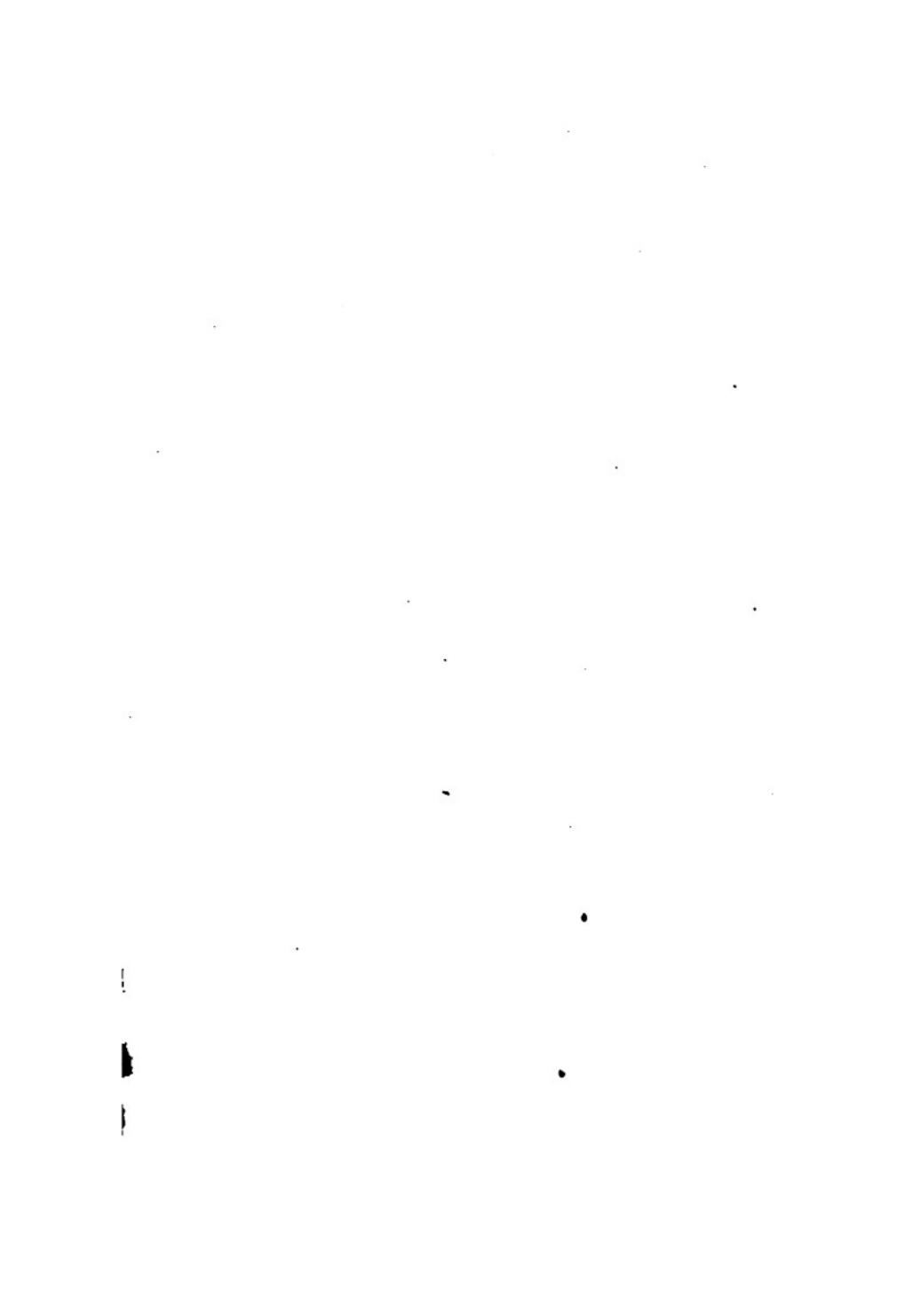
powers being withheld from the Church, is not from any unwillingness on Christ's part to have his gospel preached to all mankind, nor because he has chosen to withdraw the "great power of God;" but simply because the unhol-ly and distracted state of the Church will not permit of any supernatural gifts being granted, without endangering her own existence? Until purity and love be re-established in her members, perhaps it is better that the Church proceed at a slower pace than our wishes would suggest. But brighter days will come. Holiness to the Lord shall be written on the bells of the horses; even the common walks of merchandize shall be sanctified, and the ordinary transactions of life shall be made a constant sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts.

Revelation tells us that when the Bride shall prepare herself for the heavenly Bride-groom, by putting on fine linen, clear and white, (or bright,) which is the righteousness of saints; then shall heaven be opened, and the white horse of the Word of God shall appear, his garments dipped in blood, and on *his head* many crowns. And the armies of *the Church* shall follow him, upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and glisten-

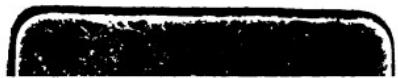
ing ; going forth conquering and to conquer.* Here we peculiarly notice the colour of Messiah's horse, and the garments of his saints. The clear and glistening white must be victorious; it is the colour of heaven's purity and joy.

After a short struggle between this *holy* army and the powers of darkness, the conquest of sin shall be complete ; and another glorious scene shall be displayed. The Bridegroom shall come forth to meet his ready Bride ; and a great voice shall be heard in heaven, saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.† Behold I make all things new." Even so, Amen ! Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

*Rev. 19. 7, 8, 11, 12, 14. †Rev. 21. 3, 4.







1 2 3 4

